The Midyear Harvest

Chronicles of Culture

Volume 2, Number 5 September/October 1978

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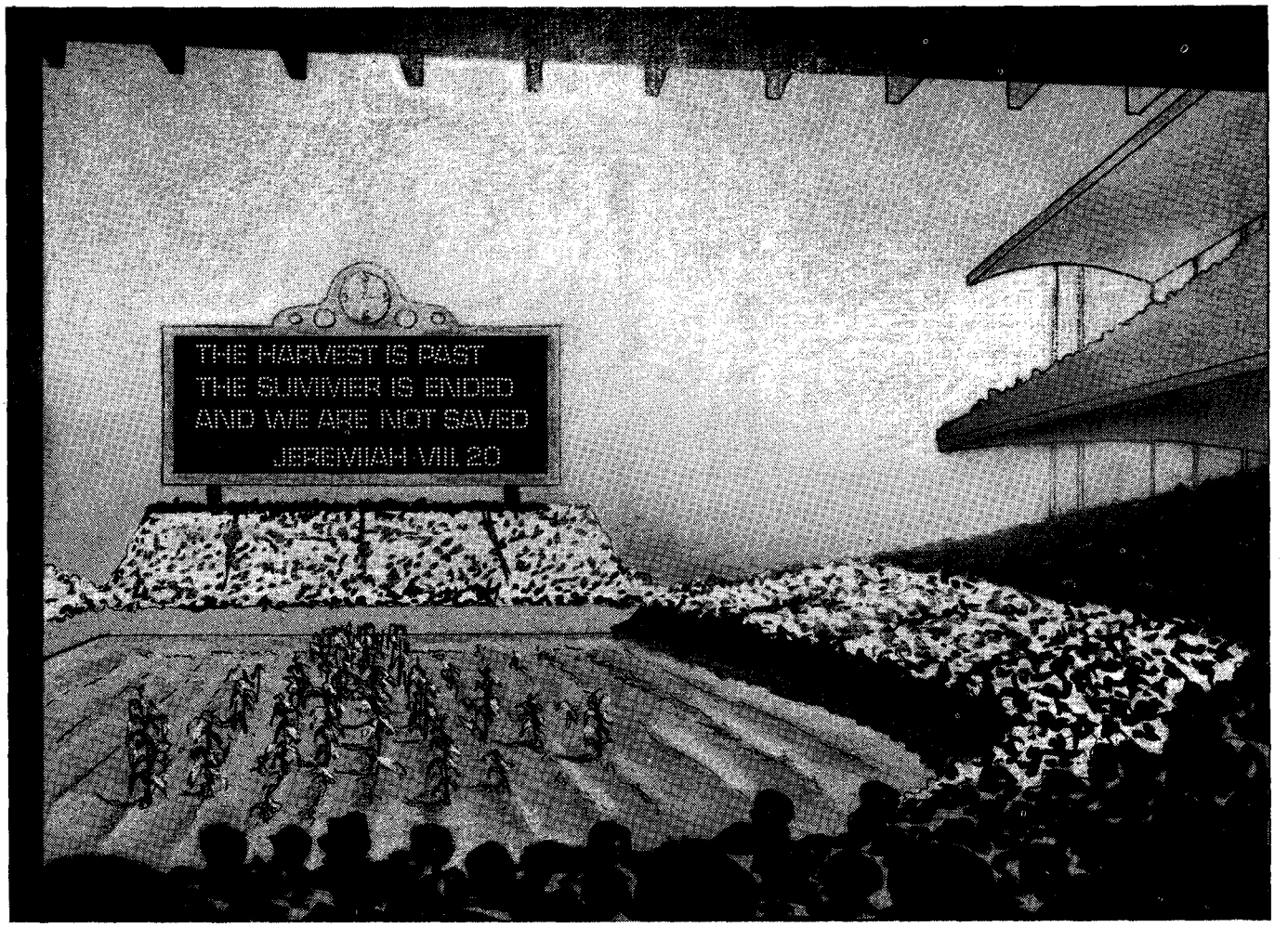

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Comment

We are repeatedly asked to explain what we mean by the term "Liberal Culture"—the one combination of words perhaps most often used in these pages.

The general impression is that whatever it means we do not like it. This is correct.

So before we venture into subtle reasoning on what we mean by what, it should be stated forcefully and unequivocally that liberalism and the Liberal Culture are not synonymous, not the same, and often—though not too often of late—at odds. The progressive assimilation and identification of liberalism with the Liberal Culture is a disturbing and deplorable occurrence.

Liberalism has enriched mankind with everlasting values. Man and society are indebted to its moral merits. As an attitude built around the predisposition to freedom, inquiry and progress, it has accompanied the Judeo-Christian civilization since its dawn. As a philosophy, it began with the Renaissance, and reached a golden age in the XVIII century Enlightenment—thus becoming endemic to the very conception of American society and statehood. Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Jefferson, Kant, Goethe, de Tocqueville, Lord Acton, Stendhal and Cavour would not have objected to being called liberals in the initial sense of the word. John Stuart Mill completed the liberal philosophy, while Gladstone determined liberal politics. Western democracy of today is unthinkable without those men. We are ideologically fed on their thought and vision. We owe our sense of modern justice, of social community and equity to liberalism.

With the apotheosis of Western liberalism at the end of the XIX century, there began to emerge a world of new anxieties eagerly and quickly seized upon for development into ideological doctrines. Much earlier, Marxism had rejected liberalism as "a bourgeois faith, a hollow, never fulfilled promise of democracy." Many liberals—Matthew Arnold comes first to mind as an epitome—began to feel an intellectual itch for something more than freedom, reason, individualism, responsibility and tolerance. The quest for new entitlements carried deep into our age, spawning cultural and political extremisms. Somehow, sometime, liberalism lost its marvelous clarity of purpose, its masterfully articulated necessity of moral order, grounded in the respect for the human mind and conscience. "Progress was all right once, but it went on too long," this old and artful saying sums it all up. Liberalism's epigones, especially in America, began to delve into socio-political speculations devoid of philosophical substance.

* * *

Liberalism has been appropriated as the label for so many causes that now it is often taken for what it is not. The highly moral motivations of Locke and Adam Smith, or the sophistication of de Tocqueville, gave way to the Whig insensitivity in England and a laissez-faire voracity American-style. When Francois Guizot, the French liberal statesman, proclaimed his famous "Enrichissez-vous!" in the 1860's, it was understood in its proper context, for Guizot was a man of renowned, even self-righteous, moral and ethical integrity. Men, he believed, should individually strive for affluence through industry and enterprise, but never without a keen sense of the moral perils and moral obligations involved in such endeavors. Although flattened and warped, this socio-moral precept survives in many capitalistic circles.

The liberal Guizot would have difficulty recognizing as fellow liberals Senators Kennedy and McGovern who believe that the state and the government—society's executive arms—should solve the problems of economic destiny for American citizens. Thomas Hobbes, that Nestor of liberal philosophers, who wrote: ". . .liberties depend on the silence of the law—" would have read with disbelief the *New York Times'* manifestos on how liberalism today means freeing people from misery and ignorance with the help of an omnipotent bureaucracy. Since the '30s, American liberalism, even while still committed in part to the freedom of property and enterprise, has come to mean a social-democratic solution to all social ills. Its old preoccupation with grounding moral postulates in reason, empirical dialectics, and civic virtues—such as fairness of judgment, toleration of other views, respect for other people—seems to have vanished. And it's at this point where our argument with the contemporary American version of liberalism begins. An argument which infers neither hostility nor civilizational incompatibility.

* * *

However, in the mid-sixties—the nadir of the American culture to my mind—a new doctrinal interpretation of liberalism emerged. We believe it hostile to man, woman and child alike and incompatible with Western civilizaton as we inherited it from its builders and molders through millenia. We call this phenomenon the Liberal Culture—as it uses cultural means for its expansion, and exploits liberalism's hard won principles of social and political interplay. The circumstance that liberalism is unable to rid itself of the Liberal Culture's companionship somehow attests to its decline. Sooner or later, the pernicious influence of the Liberal Culture will seal liberalism's fate.

* * *

The Liberal Culture can be described as the wandering of certain ideas, trends, and intellectual preferences from Jean-Jacques Rousseau right up to Larry Flynt. What happened in between is the evolution of the libcultural syndrome. Flynt, a sinister low-brow, inadvertently hit an XVIII century deistic tone, when—after the travesty of his embracing Christianity—he declared that his *Hustler* magazine would henceforth be "less degrading" to women and religion.

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No one, to our recollection, has tried to summarize the Liberal Culture's overall stance, so let us try.

The Liberal Culture has a philosophy. It is based on mistaking the spontaneity of life instincts for indeterminism. Such a view of the nature of life brings permissiveness forward as the ultimate guide for existence and behavior—it establishes the "truth" that whatever is permitted is right and good, and whatever prohibited wrong and bad. The ontology and humanism that derive from such a vision of being must inevitably lead to what D.H. Lawrence described as "the village-idiot mind, playing with muck."

The Liberal Culture has its surrogate of religion. It centers on the cult of incoherence of thought and instincts, constantly advertised through the cultural media as a salutary and propitious alternative to codified and organized human endeavors. Such religiosity was once perceived as eccentricity and inanity, but its libcultural version has a tremendous capability to mess up human lives.

The Liberal Culture has its ethics. It deems indulgence superior to love. It advocates normlessness of emotions and persecutes any preference for moral order. It promotes amorphous latitude in lieu of a principled commitment to passion or person.

The Liberal Culture has its psychology, or, in point of fact, favors the wholesale substitution of psychology for religious and lay morality. Libcultural psychology is supposed to be the answer to all existential enigmas, and the supreme guiding agent of soul and mind. The symbiosis between modern psychology, as omniscient and omnipotent, and the Liberal Culture has resulted in the daily newspapers championing an adaptability to neuroses as a triumph of progress and social conscience. If we feel lower than Sodomites in the area of mores these days, it is because the libcultural psychology has established every animalism and bestiality of impulse and predisposition as a human value. The Sodomites, to their advantage, didn't have cameras and fast-printing presses, which the Liberal Culture monopolizes. The foremost casualty of the libcultural fascination with psychology: the human sense of normalcy which is being wiped out of our current reality. The most helpless prey: children who are being robbed of their childhood by rampant pornography, libcultural psychology's favorite toy. Libcultural psychology operates virtually unopposed by the social forces that traditionally influence consciousness and behavior. To the contrary, one has the impression that a monstrous collusion of cultural influences—from the *New York Times* to *Newsweek* to *Vogue,* the liberal faculties of Ivy League universities, and all the Warhols, Altmans, Jaggers, Yves St. Laurents, Pasolinis and Vidals of this world—is trying its best to implant libcultural psychology's supposition that self-destruction is the primary privilege of an individual and a society. An atmosphere of murderous license in which *everything* can be inflicted on *everybody* for a cheap price is created daily by the media. Sexual molestation of children is nothing new, however, it has never been a cultural prerogative endorsed by psychology. It is now, thanks to the power of the Liberal Culture.

The Liberal Culture has its sociology which peddles the shapelessness of social interaction as freedom, and anarchic egomania as egalitarianism. It mercilessly extirpates common sense from politics and economics. It superimposes ideological divisiveness upon the American family and politicizes both the dinner table and the movie house. It fanatically touts the legislation and bureaucratization of moral and personal sensitivities. Feelings are forcibly kneaded by libcultural sociology into platitudes determining our social conduct and private destinies. Feminism, the libculture's perversion of the educational process, half-baked theories of crime, justice, and the penitentiary system are leading contributors to the decay of the American civilization.

And, of course, Liberal Culture has its aesthetics, literature, arts, and its overpowering cultural credo. Its creativity in this vein has brought us to the point where the distinction between brutal explicitness and sincerity has been lost. The abominable has been declared beautiful and equated with innocence. The Liberal Culture has entered a claim that the degenerate be given not only equal rights and compassion, but also a title to artistry—and he has gotten it all. It has declared the responsibility for vice null, thus opening the door to miserable sophists who extort the money, fame and honors society once reserved for prophets. Liberationism—that weird progeny of the Liberal Culture—has come to mean both ideology and lifestyle: it has made people, who are completely free, claim that they should be freed from nonexistent oppressions, e.g. from the prerequisites of civilization, marriage, driving regulations and breakfast habits. Needless to say, such an "ideology" is less amusing when it causes acts of imbecility, reduces people to doleful libcultural marionettes, and ultimately wreaks havoc in human lives. The most ominous feature of the Liberal Culture—its mortal sin—is the cultivation of moods of disintegration and decomposition. These have been translated into pop-cultural fare by countless books, movies, plays, rock concerts—while the liberal critics and teachers declare them humanity's deliverance. The libcultural sway over the media and entertainment industry has endowed the psychopath, the deviate, the vicious criminal humanoid with the status of cultural hero. As E.W.F. Tomlin puts it in his excellent essay ("Intellectual Treason," in the British *New Universities Quarterly,* Summer 1978):

> "Low and deviant tastes have been catered for in every society, but never before have they been deliberately moulded."

* * *

> "A climate of legalized lie and hypocrisy, which pervades a substantial sphere of the American reality, differs very little from the Soviet cant. There—it is an official cant imposed by the party

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Opinions & Views

A Timid Call to Arms

John Gardner: *On Moral Fiction;* Basic Books; New York.

by Thomas Molnar

Let me say right at the beginning: John Gardner's book is, as the formula goes, a refreshingly sane approach to literature. It cuts through the fat of literary criticism's accumulated clichés, and it condemns these clichés not merely as boring manifestations of an ossified intellectual/artistic orthodoxy but—this is even more truly refreshing—as inadmissible in civilized speech and conduct, that is for literary use.

Let me go farther in praise. Gardner acknowledges a hierarchy in the literary art, putting on the top Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, and others, of course, too, including contemporary writers, for example James Joyce. The way he concludes the existence of this hierarchy, that is the existence of very great writers, then, in descending order, mediocre, unimportant, frivolous ones, businessman-writers and immoral writers—is to grasp what one might call the "artist's morality." While this does not contradict "ordinary" morality, it is directed, and by the nature of the artist's public function, heightened, to the level of true idea-images which transcribe reality, not more, not less. But of course this transcription is not the cassette's mechanical recording. Since reality includes innumerable layers, also the moral layer, for the writer to encounter, and then serve the *real,* he must be a moral man: humble and universal, an honest inquirer into what *is,* yet genuinely surprised when his own characters invent themselves freely. (The trouble here is that Sartre validly criticized Mauriac for planning his characters' every step—"for playing God in their regard"—yet Mauriac is an incomparably greater literary artist than Sartre who grants them their "existential" freedom.)

For Gardner, the literary craft is similar to the philosopher's according to Aristotle: both *marvel* at reality as it is and as it comes into existence. Agreement also with Socrates: the poet and the novelist are midwives to the birth and rebirth of created things. In further praise of John Gardner, he is perhaps the only American novelist-critic today willing to put his name to this sentence: "The writing of fiction is a mode of thought because by imitating we come to understand the thing we imitate. Fiction is thus a convincing and honest but unverifiable science (in the old sense, knowledge): unverifiable because it depends on the reader's sensitivity and clear sense of how things are, a sense for which we have no tests."

Gardner's mind and critical acumen establish a world where artists are beyond the frivolities of the up-to-date and of an empty technical smartness. He seems sincerely to loathe the artists' jet-set, more despicable certainly than the one that used to surround Jackie and Ari on (the well-named) Scorpio Island. Last spring listening to Ionesco's lecture on the artist's craft I had the same impression as while reading certain chapters in Gardner's book: the conviction that only the bare minimum counts, that the real artist operates at the rockbottom. There is no other way of describing this approach except God-fearing honesty. In art, cheating and its myriad tricks, including the smart-alecky skills, the frivolities so placed as to pretend at depth, the psychic convolutions, the playing of variations on the Freudian piano, etc.—is (almost?) as blasphemous as the torture of an innocent child, Dostoyevski's obsessively recurring theme.

Well, neither Ionesco, nor Gardner tolerate cheating, and the latter's book as, in another register, Ionesco's lecture, details the ways of circumventing such a temptation. In great literature, then, reality is ever present, under many disguises, including the writer's recognition that the hero's destiny is intertwined with the idea-image, Beatrice for Dante or the gods for Achilles and Hector. This passage in Gardner's book serves also as an explanation why today, under the desiccating stare of Freud, Sartre, and Wittgenstein (and other false idols on Gardner's list, and mine) the novelist is paralyzed, his vital source, belief in reality, having been taken away from him. "On the whole, our serious novelists, like our painters and composers, are short on significant belief. Though quick to preach causes . . . and to believe slogans . . . they are short on moral fiber, the special moral fiber, part character, part knowledge, of the artist." The result may be an amorous devotion to surface, to texture, to technique, and naturally to the best-seller status with "deep" reviews where it "counts"; but in no case a work of art. In a word, Gardner denounces as connected symptoms the American writers' immorality and superficiality, twin products of their scorn for reality, moral and ontological.

What Gardner reveals on his pages is not just the sad story of an entire generation of writers going wrong—thanks to creative writing classes, psychological tricks, and commercialization, but primarily the flawed vision of a nation whose writers first struggle for a grasp of reality, then most often and tragically, give up. Granted, Freud *et al.* have reduced reality to how the subject feels about it, so that the writer dare not look reality in the face for fear of finding it out; but is this reality not a hundred times camouflaged too—even without Freud—by layers of the public myth? Let us keep in mind Oliver Alden in Santayana's *The Last Puritan,* lamenting that he is "ready for every sacrifice but has nothing to pin his allegiance to." The same Santayana notes (in a letter to Logan Piersall Smith) that "American arts and sciences are in the

Dr. Molnar is a distinguished scholar of literature and criticism.

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service of material life. Material, together with hygiene, morality, and international good order." A menu to discourage any robust Balzac whose appetite for reality could not be easily obstructed.

Thus most of our writers, young and those who were once young, are willy-nilly cast in the role of Oliver Alden. The nation asks nothing of them beyond entertainment and shock. Hence, but Gardner makes no mention of it, their obsession for *facts,* descriptions amounting to facts, the accumulation of thousands of extremely subtle observations of street scenes, sex games, battlefields, and neo-genteel behavior; hence the vacuousness of their attempts to capture ordinary feelings and, as Gardner would say, to refer to truth, Beatrice behind Dante. The overall impression of this literature is that the trees hide the forest, that so much happens (for the reportorial eye) that nothing can be genuinely described. The skill acquired from creative writing classes and workshops, or with a similar illusoriness, from writers in college residence, smothers the honest talent and rises, with a forbidding finger, before the genius. There is a frightening passage in an article by the Anglo-Hungarian writer, George Faludy, describing the sinking of an U.S. warship in World War Two. "The sailors and troops jumped into the water still licking their ice cream cones." To my mind, a worse than apocalyptic sight, not a daredevil act but a completely misunderstood moment, a nutshell misapprehension of life. The episode, no matter how remote from our writers' preoccupations, goes a long way toward illustrating their inability to write "moral fiction." Gardner puts it better than I could: "We need to stop excusing mediocre and downright pernicious art, stop 'taking it for what it's worth' as we take our fast foods, our overpriced cars that are not good, the overpriced houses we spend all our lives fixing, our television programs, our schools thrown up like barricades in the way of young minds, our brainless fat religions . . . We would not put up with a debauched king, but in a democracy all of us are kings, and we praise debauchery as pluralism. This book is of course no condemnation of pluralism; but it is true that art is in one sense fascistic: it claims, on good authority, that some things are healthy for individuals and society and some things are not."

Minus the silly reference to art being fascistic because it claims authority and moral health, Gardner in this passage diagnoses the social-cultural background of immoral—and untrue—fiction and is driven implicitly to state that the writer is caught up in the web of his society.

Alas, so is John Gardner. His many, quite remarkable, passages end up by leaving us cold, exactly as if he were the professor in a creative writing class. What he writes is mostly true, and the passages I quoted might erase all my critical notes and all his sins. And he needs this advance absolution for he will be dragged to the pillory. Yet, somehow he partakes of the general flatness he documents and denounces, and gives the impression of a conscientious doctoral candidate who ties up the loose ends of a dissertation.

Let's skip over a few passages where Gardner uses words for which the last legitimate users were Chaucer and Rabelais. In fact, it is not the rare coarseness which offends in this book, it is, if I may use the expression, a lack of juiciness. I am not acquainted with John Gardner's fiction, my judgment may be unjustly one-sided. But I find in *this* book whose topic and scope may prove more important than the author's novels, a disproportion between *what* he writes and *how* he writes it—which is, also, after all, what literary criticism is about. I repeat, the book is extremely important, it ought to cause a metanoia in our literary circles. Nobody, for a long time, has written about the art of fiction as Gardner does: that literature is not just another conventional way of self-expression, nor a vast psychoanalytic couch, nor the occasion for displaying the novelist's ego—but one of the very highest human pursuits. Precisely: this book ought to have been conceived as more than an additional volume of literary criticism, it ought to have been turned into a *manifesto.* It should have emerged as a fierce condemnation, a drawing of battle lines, a call to still honest writers to cross the lines in our direction. It should have become a basically conservative manifesto, not a timid pulling at the writer's sleeve but a piece of vigorous prose in the tradition of great pamphletists.

Instead of this, Gardner authored a kind of textbook. The supreme irony is that it may be taken up by professors in workshops of creative writing. □

"Gardner is clever about the deficiencies of American novelists but unfair about writers whose sense of life is uncomfortably too intense for him."
—*Esquire*

"*On Moral Fiction* is . . . a loosely connected sequence of repetitive assertions—opinionated, sincere, tautological, over-ambitious, and ultimately less than persuasive."
—*Library Journal*

"Because Mr. Gardner's argument is old-fashioned, it is also very familiar, perhaps much more so than Mr. Gardner realizes . . . *On Moral Fiction* . . . never gets much past pronouncements and down to the essential tasks. It is not, for all its solemnity, a serious book."
—*New York Times Book Review*

"There's more table-banging than reason here."
—*New Times*

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The Spiritual Splendors of Weakness and Myopia

Graham Greene: *The Human Factor;* Simon and Schuster; New York.

by Mary Ellen Fox

Ashenden, James Bond and George Smiley, those notable protagonists of the novel of espionage, are way stations signaling the changing nature of the genre. Somerset Maugham's *alter ego* was an amateur who nonetheless carried out his patriotic obligations during World War I in accordance with the strictest professional code. Bond, an amalgam of science fiction with the post World War II sexual pop scene, seems to have been created just for the moving picture screen. Ian Fleming's hero, much less of a literary personality than Maugham's Ashenden, was a reaction to the realities of the Cold War with its absolute moral and ideological positions put into a comic strip aesthetics and seasoned with a middle-aged writer's libidinous imagination. Yet, whether reality is comprised of the consequences of minutiae or a glamorous, action-packed never-never-land, duty to king and country was unquestioningly, even enthusiastically performed. This seems like a fairy tale compared to today's spy novels. The world of John Le Carré, which is chronologically much closer to Bond than to Ashenden, is a grubby little universe furnished with grubby little files and peopled with grubby little bureaucrats living in grubby little bed sitters. The most complete and significant turnabout, however, has been a reevaluation of purpose and a questioning of principles. The novel of espionage—a predominantly British product—appears now to be a very British way of coping with political factualities and the national attitudes toward them.

Graham Greene's *The Human Factor* is a continuation of both the author's own literary tradition and that of the genre. It further develops the deromanticization of the secret agent as a deskbound code cracker and paper pusher, who increasingly questions the necessity of maintaining loyalty to the home office. Greene delved into the platitude, shabbiness and cheapness of the allegedly romantic professions and vocations long before Le Carré did. He produced, in this respect, literary achievements of magnitude. His Catholicism, or rather the never-ending substantiation of his conversion, brought into imaginative use with a writing acumen and intensity unrivaled in contemporary world literature, helped him to create an unique body of work. *The Human Factor* remains well-grounded in the same intellectual and stylistic tradition. It is an alloy of Greene's Catholic literary sensibility dealing with important moral problems, which has produced *The Power and the Glory, The End of the Affair* and *The Heart of the Matter,* with his "entertainments" such as *This Gun for Hire, The Ministry of Fear* and *The Confidential Agent.* However, a difference must be registered. *The Human Factor* is also an ideologically obnoxious book with disturbing moral implications.

Maurice Castle, outwardly drab, greying, dependable, works for the British secret service, processing African intelligence. When a leak is discovered, he is—incomprehensibly, considering his background—the last to be suspected. The superiors in his department focus their distrust on a younger and more flamboyant colleague and ultimately—and unconvincingly, to this reader—murder him to prevent further damages. They are unaware that underneath

Dr. Fox, Yale '74, is a literary critic.

"*The Human Factor* is an elegant work . . . It's a marvelous novel, crystalline and understated, that tenderly, cruelly, almost regretfully refuses to gratify our romantic expectations."
—*Newsweek*

"Graham Greene should long since have been accorded the Nobel Prize. He is 'integrity's' laureate, whether Stockholm accepts him or no."
—*The New Republic*

"Patriotism has fragmented into love . . . Graham Greene continues to enrich The Way We Live Now."
—*Esquire*

"The world's most gracefully gifted and practiced storyteller operating at full power."
—*Kirkus Reviews*

"Probably the best espionage novel ever written."
—*UPI*

". . . one does not have to agree with everything in this book to enjoy it."
—*Chicago Tribune Book World*

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Castle's facade of placid reliability is a man of divided loyalties and intense hatreds. When Castle did field work in South Africa, he learned to loathe the government of apartheid there, which made his love for Sarah, a black and his future wife, a crime. Their escape from South Africa was aided by the Communists. A mixture of gratitude to his benefactors, as well as powerful antipathy toward his own country which supports the South African regime, turns Castle into a double agent for the Soviets, to whom he feeds top secret information pertaining to British involvement in South Africa.

Castle can be associated with other anti-establishment figures canonized by today's liberal image makers. In point of fact, he is of the same fabric as Daniel Ellsberg and even John Dean, who pit themselves against the decision-making powers to make what they consider short-term betrayals for the long-term good. Being ideologically motivated is enough to exonerate them in the eyes of contemporary assessors. By many standards these days, Castle is a virtuous man, since the South African government is in the liberal consciousness an unallayed Evil and his own country he betrays is comprised of expedient murderers, according to his experience. Greene's position on this seems clear enough.

However, as an impressively talented writer with a subtlety of approach to character and circumstance, Greene never used to be at ease with such a black and white evaluation of complex matters as betrayal and guilt. They are subjects he has frequently explored, with considerably more depth in other novels than in this one. His "whiskey priest" in *The Power and the Glory* is torn by two obsessions: his awareness of his sinfulness and his overpowering urge to transcend his frailties and become a martyr. It is a monumental struggle. In *The Heart of the Matter,* Deputy Commissioner Scobie, perhaps Greene's most humane character, betrays his faith with the best of intentions: pity for those around him. Torn asunder by love and compassion, he destroys himself in the eyes of his Church by false communion and suicide disguised as natural death.

Therefore, what surprises in *The Human Factor* is that the tension between transgression and conscience seems curiously absent in Castle. Greene does not present him racked by guilt, not even when Davis, the wrong man, is killed because of Castle's sabotage. The responsibility, suggests Greene, is totally that of his British employers. Even the Communists are blameless compared to the British. As Castle confides to Sarah: "When people talk about Prague and Budapest and how you can't find a human face in communism I stay silent. Because I've seen—once—the human face. I say to myself that if it hadn't been for Carson, Sam would have been born in a prison and you would probably have died in one. One kind of Communism—or Communist—saved you and Sam." This kind of argument—which Greene never refutes by presenting any example of circumstance to the contrary—is as morally logical and defensible as is endorsing the policies of Nazism because of one decent SS officer. It is also obvious to the reader unimpaired by political prejudice that Sarah's and Castle's rescue in Soweto was motivated more by politics than by altruism: the help extended to them by righteous Communists is calculated to bring dividends. Castle is thus a dupe, a manipulated character, and is consequently lacking in the stature necessary to make any of Greene's ideological or literary points. Our sympathy for and interest in him therefore becomes tepid and perfunctory, more an obligation extorted by the narrator than a genuine sympathy generated by the story itself. Castle does not make a wrong existential choice: *it* makes him. His treachery is insistingly presented as due to his intense love for his wife facilitated by the author's obviously unfair treatment of other considerations. From the very beginning all his actions are geared toward their being together—very understandable from the emotional perspective, but hardly sufficient justification to betray his country without putting such a decision into a larger human context. He is not even too successful in carrying out his personal goals, ending up behind the Iron Curtain with little hope of ever seeing Sarah again. The only judgment Greene does pass on his protagonist is that Castle is a pitiful bungler—another exercise in literary unfairness as it is Greene's ideological preferences that make him a contemptible loser. When Castle senses things closing in on him and is pressured to bail out, he sends his wife away and then must get rid of the family dog. He dispatches the animal with a pistol, but later learns that it wasn't killed instantly, that it lingered for hours in agony. The good intentions—hatred of tyranny, love for his wife, pity for animal and human suffering—that motivate Castle pave the way to a hell of death, betrayal and isolation.

Castle is disturbingly unaware of the implications of his behavior. When thanked by a British Communist for all that he has done for the Party he protests, "I've helped you over Africa, that's all." Don't they—Castle and Greene—realize that there is no such thing as "that's all" in this situation, that such a position even if based on ignorance, is morally and pragmatically inexcusable and untenable? The old "domino theory" of spheres of influence applies here as well: it takes very little imagination to connect the triumph of Communist forces in Africa with the struggle of Soviet dissidents, a fact of life intrinsic to the very actuality which we can no longer ignore. By writing a book—even under the guise of an "entertainment"—that sympathizes with and thus gives tacit approval, even an underhanded glamor, to the "undeserved" miseries and modern dramatics of Castle's lot, and at the same time not clearly pointing out the *political* and *moral* consequences of such behavior, Greene casts serious doubt on his position as a serious contender for the Nobel Prize. Even though so many voices all over the world have long expressed surprise that he has not yet been honored with it. □

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Feelin' Good as a Catholic Dilemma

Mary Gordon: *Final Payments;* Random House; New York.

by Christopher Manion

Isabel Moore, it seems, has a problem: her father, whom she nursed through eleven years of illness, has died, and she must get on with the business of living—sell the house, get a job, meet new friends, and decide what to do with her life. She must step gingerly across the threshold to a world which she has scarcely noticed since she was nineteen. All in all, the makings of a good story. But Isabel Moore has another problem: she is a Catholic. That is, she was *raised* a Catholic, and part of her problem lies in the truth of what every Catholic learns in grade school: there is no such thing as an *ex*-Catholic. And that is precisely what Isabel Moore wants to be. She has lived eleven years in one kind of unreality and seeks comfort (she would like that term) in another. The reader might find the story line uninspired, and the transparent development of the supporting characters a blessing in disguise. It saves more attention for Isabel's confrontation with her father, his faith, and her future.

To this subtle sequence of still lifes, which culminates in the epiphany of Isabel Moore, author Mary Gordon devotes a talent which manages to depict brutality and devotion with an equally soft touch. In fact, they often seem synonymous. This is a part of Isabel Moore's problem, and it, of course, becomes Mary Gordon's problem because she chooses to articulate the Catholic Isabel and the Catholic Church with the same tired runes usually reserved for the runaway priests who elope with the nun who taught your sister in sixth grade. These, as we are all supposed to know, are drunk, insensitive priests, dealing with hungry children whose parents send money to some lunatic in Canada who thinks he has the stigmata. There is no relief. The bigotry is by nature oppressive, even hackneyed (like ex-communists, ex-Catholics are the most devoted critics of their former selves), but in Isabel Moore we see no escape to reality, only a resurrection into nothingness. The pearl of great price becomes a blackened, charred remnant of a faith easily discarded for whatever bleak "life" is left in the world.

Bleak, indeed. Isabel's two childhood friends, Liz and Eleanor, represent the two sources of her inspiration for the future. Liz is married, has two children, and lives in the country. Her Irish politician husband has many lovers, among whom he soon includes Isabel; Liz, chastened, enjoys a lesbian lover who raises horses next door. Eleanor, on the other hand, offers the lifestyle of the single city girl—long books, relaxing baths, leisurely Sunday brunches. She lived with her boyfriend until he got tired of her after six years and kicked her out. She might go back to graduate school. In her slow emergence into the world, Isabel oscillates between these two influences with wide-eyed naiveté. The only experience all three really share is a common hatred of the Church which they inherited from their childhoods.

More on the supporting cast: Margaret Casey, who kept house for Isabel's father after his wife died (when Isabel was three), represents everything tawdry in the faith which hasn't already been discredited by Isabel's father and all his priest friends. Isabel remembers her "when the touch of her damp finger could sicken me for the afternoon." Margaret now lives in upstate New York and writes Isabel letters which wallow in self-pity under the guise of accepting suffering; and Isabel detests her. Almost as much as she detests herself. For Isabel bears a burden of guilt which stretches like an unbroken line from the bed where her father found her with his best student (this, she is convinced, caused his stroke three weeks later) to the finger of the wife of the man she wants to marry—if he gets a divorce—shaking at her an inch away from her face, in the middle of her crowded office. The unredeemed quality of her shame—one so perverse that the Church has no name for it, thus cannot forgive it—drives Isabel to pursue her own self-imposed soteriology—hence the eleven years of "selfless" service to her father's dying corpse, and the culminating exile in service of Margaret Casey, in search of meaningless suffering which will nicely reflect the brutality of the faith which she hates, but cannot replace. Like her father, it is dying but refuses to die. In seeking to love the unlovable Margaret she redeems the lack of meaning which surrounded the sickbed in Queens and the bed in the next room where she had been found with her lover. God demands payment for her "special gifts"—intelligence, beauty—and she accepts this cruelty without question.

> "There is however, more: the electric prose. On whether love is measured by sacrifice: 'wrong . . . because the minute I gave up something for someone I like them less' . . . On sexual technique: 'He handled my breast as if he were making a meatball.' A first-class writer declares herself with knowing art."
>
> —John Leonard in the *New York Times*

The reader searches in vain for a glimmer of insight to illuminate the redemptive value of suffering in the eyes of the Church which Gordon pretends to portray. The perceptive qualities woven through the other dimensions of the narrative—a cool, unemotional freshness in touching things human, even emotion itself—imply by default the shabby, tired quality of the Catholicism of Isabel Moore. Surely, we must think to ourselves, such a perceptive author would have portrayed a richer faith if the Faith were indeed richer.

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But, of course, it is not. For Isabel Moore, the Church has failed because it has failed in its ultimate mission to make her happy, or feel good; and these two alternatives slowly ooze into one, while suffering remains the scourge of an angry God whom we cannot love, since we cannot hurt Him back. And, since we are all ultimately selfish, the identification of suffering with the redemptive mission of a suffering Christ is just out of the question: it will not be discussed, only demeaned. Gordon slowly, exquisitely wrings the faith dry until nothing even remotely resembling charity remains. It is certainly not the faith that beholds the King of the universe manifested in a Host as light as a feather.

What is left, then, of Isabel, the poor outcast whom the "Me" generation has passed by? Exiled to a living death at Margaret Casey's, her search for atonement slowly gives way to an urge to catch up with her already fulfilled, self-indulgent friends; in the struggle between her selfishness and her guilt (the wilted remnant of charity long forgotten), the selfishness waxes triumphant. As someone once put it, "Lady Isabel slides quite unromantically from a 'sick-bed' mentality to a sick 'bed-mentality.' " The moral tension of existence collapses, replaced by a tidy, manageable life where Isabel will cope. The message is clear: if the "Me" generation has passed you by, it is not too late to catch up. To unburden herself for the journey, Isabel leaves Margaret the twenty thousand dollars which remain from the sale of her father's house. Justice, not charity: had it not been for Isabel, Margaret might have married her father. But now, in a moment of glory she reaches for the telephone and the angels waiting in the wings come to deliver her from her voluntary purgatory to drive towards New York City—and life.

Oh, yes, the resurrection occurs on the day after Good Friday. The passion has ended, the ransom has been paid, our heroine has risen above the dead faith of her dead father. It's all very symbolic. □

One's-Own-Navel Universe

John Irving: *The World According to Garp;* Henry Robbins/Dutton; New York.

by Whit Stillman

In the course of a four-novel career John Irving has failed his way to the top. *The World According to Garp* is a success of both esteem and sales volume. "Highly literate" and "compulsively readable"—the worn superlatives for two different kinds of fiction—both apply to *Garp.*

In his book Irving has followed the literary dictum to "write about what one knows." His subject is a novelist's narcissism. It is convincingly rendered. As T.S. Garp, the novel's title character, Irving succeeds in making himself "come alive." Beyond this central drama—of a novelist not wrestling with his enormous self-regard—the story is alternately flat or grotesque; "richly humorous" in reviewers' language.

Garp's life begins when Jenny Fields—a young nurse with an abhorrence of sex but passion for a child—impregnates herself by a comatose World War II casualty in her care, Technical Sergeant Garp. ("T.S. Garp" is his namesake as well as son.) Jenny Fields recounts this hospital tryst twenty years later in her bestselling autobiography, *A Sexual Suspect.* It makes her a celebrity and a heroine to the women's movement, and as a result the New England mansion she has inherited is overwhelmed with "Ellen Jamesians," a cult of fanatical feminists who have cut out their tongues in sympathy for 11-year-old rape victim, Ellen James. Another Jenny Fields hanger-on and Garp intimate is transsexual Roberta Muldoon, formerly Robert Muldoon of the Philadelphia Eagles. Ultimately, in the course of a gubernatorial campaign in New Hampshire Jenny Fields is assassinated by a crazed opponent of feminism and gun control. The implication, however, is that Governor Thomson and Manchester *Union Leader* Publisher Loeb are somehow responsible for her death. Meanwhile T.S. Garp has had a romance with a dying prostitute in Vienna and lost his five-year-old son in a freak accident—his car striking the one in which his wife is engaged in an unnatural sex act with her ex-lover, castrating him. Later Garp publishes a sensational best-seller of his own and is assassinated by a deranged Ellen Jamesian. Melodrama like this might seem improbable, but to readers of the bestselling fiction genre it will not be unfamiliar.

Between sensational episodes Irving always returns to the novel's central theme: himself. Perhaps all writing involves narcissism; traditionally novelists have tried to camouflage it or make it seem pardonable; now some seem to want to make it as obtrusive as possible. No more false reticence. In Erica Jong's novels narcissism is explored at three levels: Erica Jong writing about a character like herself writing about a character still very Erica Jong-like. In *The World According to Garp* Irving writes about a novelist who's writing a book called *The World According to Bensenhaver.* Fortunately, Bensenhaver's not a novelist but a cop—though there's a strong implication that he's "the cop in Irving," another alter ego. Within these not very narrow limits, nearly every possibility for self-contemplation is realized. Previously published fictional works by Irving are ascribed to Garp and inserted entire into the novel. Then the other characters discuss them in terms of style, point-of-view, meaning, theme, realization of objectives, quality. Garp's talent, press clippings, fan mail, philosophies of life and fiction, sales strategy, sense of humor and place in literary history are all covered. It resembles a one-man symposium in *The Writer* magazine. Perhaps some of the

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considerable press comment on *The World According to Garp* has been stimulated by the reviewers' hope that their remarks will be reprinted in a future novel by Irving, or in a posthumous one by Garp.

Why a professional novelist might wallow in autobiography of the most obvious kind should be viewed with understanding—if without compassion or ordinary human kindness. From when the typical author awakes in the morning, or in the afternoon, he faces a day of professionally unnecessary self-absorption. Over a light lunch with his wife he might discuss his past work: "In 'The Pension Grillparzer,' " he might say, to mention a story of both Irving's and Garp's, "I somehow struck the chord of comedy (on the one hand) and compassion (on the other). The story did not belittle the *people* in the story—either with forced cuteness or with any other exaggeration rationalized as necessary for making a point. Neither did the story sentimentalize the people, or otherwise cheapen their sadness." A thought occurs to him while taking out the trash: "I am in danger of limiting my ability as a writer in a fairly usual way: writing essentially about myself." While walking his pooch he contemplates what he might tell a future biographer about the novelist's craft, as Garp actually does tell his future biographer. ("Young Whitcomb [Garp's disciple] was so awed that he wrote this down.")

The narcissism of Artists, however nauseating, cannot simply be categorized as another symptom of today. It is instead part, the underside, of the Great Tradition, extending back to ancient times.

Perhaps it can be confessed at this point, without fear of being charged with sycophancy, that John Irving is a very good writer, nearly as good as Garp says he is. He has a way with words, a facility for language, the storyteller's gift, a natural talent, the ability to spin a yarn, and—for sheer readability—extraordinary narrative power. Sometimes these talents are put to good use, especially in the intervals of quiet domestic comedy. When the Garps' five-year-old son Walt is warned about the *wicked* undertow off a New England beach, he misconstrues it as a monstrous "Under Toad" in the surf. But, as it turns out, the delightful scene of the Under Toad is merely part of the build-up for one of the most contrived car accidents in literature. Another somewhat amusing moment is when Jillsy Sloper, the cleaning lady and secret manuscript evaluator for Garp's editor, returns from two days of reading *The World According to Bensenhaver.*

" 'Lawd!' Jillsy crowed. 'I never had a worse weekend. I got *no* sleep, I got *no* food. I got *no* trips to the cemetery to see my family and my friends.' "

Irving's commentary on other aspects of the publishing scene, however, puts him on poor ground. Like many of Irving's characters Garp's editor, the courageous John Wolf, dies prematurely and is frequently quoted in the press. It is actually in a news magazine article that Garp first encounters him:

> ". . . A courageous New York editor at a well-known publishing house had just rejected the manuscript submitted by an infamous former member of the government who had been convicted of stealing government money. The book was thinly disguised 'fiction' of the criminal's own sordid, petty, political dealings. 'It was a lousy novel,' the editor was quoted as saying. 'The man can't write. Why should he make any money off his crummy life?' The book, of course, would be published elsewhere, and it would eventually make its despicable author and its publisher lots of money. 'Sometimes I feel it is my responsibility to say no,' the editor was quoted as saying, 'even if I know people *do* want to read this slop.' The slop, eventually, would be treated to several serious reviews, just as if it were a serious book . . ."

Later, years after this breathtakingly principled stand, John Wolf exercises the final "stroke of genius" which is . . . "to launch *The World According to Bensenhaver* into that uncanny half-light where occasional 'serious' books glow, for a time, as also 'popular' books. John Wolf was a smart and cynical man. He knew about all the shitty autobiographical associations that make those rapid readers of gossip warm to an occasional fiction." There are evidently some autobiographical allusions of Irving's own here. He is not the kind of author to be cowed from confessing in one part of his book what he has with overflowing self-righteousness condemned a few pages before. *The World According to Garp* is so well-stocked with assassinations, egomania and melodrama—as fully as any production by Ehrlichman or Lindsay—that he

"It is not easy to find words in which to convey the joy, the excitement, the passion this superb novel evokes."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"The way he filters them [the character's situations] through his hero's unique imagination, we not only laugh at the world according to Garp, but we also accept it and love it."

—*New York Times*

"Garp's world, strange and awful as it is, is one Real World."

—*New Times*

"John Irving is so subtle."

—*Saturday Review*

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might as well be a discredited former politician.

The true contemporary touch is that after having put together a "highly commercial" novel, and after having begun to benefit from his publisher's highly commercial promotion techniques, John Irving went before Radcliffe Publishing Procedures course as himself, not simply as T.S. Garp, and attacked the "Hollywoodization" of book publishing. That he should test the limits of narcissism, be uninhibitedly mawkish and melodramatic, flirt with pornography, give the whole concoction in an overlay of hilarity and poor taste is somehow not enough. From this pulpit he must finally attack vulgarity and commercialism in an uncompromising manner. That's the modern touch and what makes John Irving one of the great novelists of today. □

Man's Real Thing

James Jones: *Whistle;* Delacorte Press; New York.

by Otto J. Scott

Early in *Whistle* a hospital ship carrying the central characters—all wounded—enters San Francisco.

> ". . . Behind them the sun was lowering in the west. It turned everything in front of them a reddish gold. The great red bridge with its great bellying bight of cable and flimsy-looking roadbed was suspended under it, visible from miles away out at sea, was golden in the sun. So were the hills at both ends of it. It was indeed a golden gateway into America, its twin supports towering up. Time seemed to hang as the ship slid along, homing to it. Facing it, tough, grizzled old troopers with years of service broke down. Restrictions limiting the upper decks to officers had been removed and everyone who could hobble or crawl was up there on them. In the channel, the great stately bridge moved slowly, majestically toward them. As the ship passed under it, hooting its arrival blasts on the ship's horn, the heads of the men craned back to look straight up at it and a ragged cheer went up. Inside the bridge was home ground, and they had finally reached it. Inside the channel, first Alcatraz and then beyond it Angel Island and Fort McDowell, the place where most of them had started their Pacific voyaging, separated themselves from the bay coast behind. Along the starboard the Embarcadero glittered. The ship curved, then turned in slowly behind it. Behind the docks Telegraph Hill and Nob Hill made rising curves. Hungry eyes studied every detail. This scene was about all of San Francisco and the bay area that any of them, almost without exception, would get to see . . . At the dock Army and civilian ambulances were waiting for them, and continued to roll in a long line. As the ship nosed in, ship's medical personnel began to move through the crowds of bathrobed men in open upper decks, telling them to get below.
>
> The main impression they got was one of enormous growth. Urban, industrial, maritime, civic. Even men who had only been gone six months, like Landers, thought they could see a difference. Whole new forests of smokestacks seemed to have sprouted. Industrial smoke seemed to have doubled. Shipping had tripled. Truck traffic had at least doubled. There were many more installations, and many more people, everywhere. To men who had been away one year, or two, or more, like Strange, it did not even seem the same city . . ."

That was *exactly* how it was. As I read these passages the years rolled back, and I recalled just such an arrival, on a troop ship. When a wave lifted us up as we passed beneath the bridge, I recall the ambulatory wounded on the deck let out an inarticulate sound that was not so much a cheer as an extraordinarily moving sigh. But I had forgotten how the city had changed—and James Jones did not.

First Sergeant Winch, in his lost-man's survey of the wartime Mark Hopkins, found the Top O' The Mark dominated by beribboned flyboys in crushed caps. He served for thousands of enlisted men as he slowly retreated down Nob Hill toward North Beach jukeboxes and homelier but more easily-approached women. The one the Sergeant found was nearly thirty, wore slacks, an open-necked shirt and a bandana: the uniform of a wartime working woman. She was a welder. Some writers would have chosen some other job, but Rosie the Riveter was real in World War II, and all Jones' people are just as real though, throughout his career, he tended to put them into situations that show signs of commercial strain.

In some hands this grates, but Jones was a writer whose tastes were formed by movies and commercial fiction: he believed in action and results. Men met women in bars in order to go to bed with them, and the women were on the same hunt. It is a relief to go vicariously on such a hunt with Sergeant Winch in San Francisco, circa 1943, and find it fulfilled with a woman who seems real and believable. She was not indifferent to the Sergeant's troubles, as they emerged—but she was not spooked by them either. She was able to deliver him back to the hospital and forget him—as he forgot her. In Jones' hands this slice of life is not cynical: he did not twist his characters into symbols; he was a powerful and

> "Jones, the dedicated realist, the expert in the way things work, wrote nothing even remotely convincing about women, but he wrote a great deal about them, nonetheless."
> —*Newsweek*

Mr. Scott, a writer and critic, is well-known to the readers of the Chronicles.

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sincere writer.

The Sergeant's troubles were not, thank heaven, sexual. They stemmed from congestive heart trouble—a condition that afflicted the author. It flows from a weakness of the heart that is progressive, and which leads to an accumulation of fluids in the body. The mortality is about fifty percent, though patients who lead austere and cautious lives may last a long time. Sergeant Winch, whom Jones first introduced as Sergeant Warden in *From Here To Eternity,* discovered on his San Francisco leave that it meant he could no longer drink or smoke—and be sure of living.

One of the more impressive descriptions of the Sergeant is that he was able to stop both habits immediately—though his ability to drink was legendary in the Army—with no great difficulty. In fact, he took a quiet satisfaction in knowing that he had the key to an outwardly respectable death in his possession, and could turn it by ordinary dissipation whenever he chose. His real problem was far more difficult: he was troubled by a recurring vision of his old platoons as they passed before him, "blank-faced, fear-eyed"—many of them, if not all, dead.

The portrait of Corporal Prell is equally arresting. ". . . small, slight," with high cheekbones and narrow, coalblack eyes, Prell is the dangerous fighter who first appeared as Prewitt. In *Whistle* he was wounded in both thighs while leading a platoon in New Georgia that discovered a Japanese force and lost several men in retreating. Sergeant Winch decided Prell deserved a Medal of Honor, and set complex Army wheels into motion. To cover this, he let it be known he thought Prell had been reckless with his men, and refused to go to see him in the hospital ship.

By the time they are all in the Memphis Army Hospital, Prell is declining; his legs refuse to heal. Despite a stoical exterior, he exudes a subtle despair. The Army doctors decide to amputate, and he refuses permission. Reluctantly they ponder overriding him. The Congressional Medal will not be awarded a legless man: that would interfere with the image the wartime Army command wants to project to the nation. Sergeant Winch, still obsessed with his private nightmare, finally visits Prell.

He notes Prell's animosity and coldly accuses Prell of deliberately losing his men in an effort to become a hero. Prell's hatred soars as Winch, disdainful, walks away. From the moment Prell begins to mend, the amputation is cancelled and the Medal of Honor is assured. Jones, in this powerful series of insights, does not explain; he depicts.

The third of *Whistle's* central characters is Landers, a buck Sergeant and clerk who had three and a half years of college. That is the only flaw, a minor one, in the characterization for me, for Landers does not reflect an education. All the other aspects of his personality: the sense of being shattered by his wound, his abiding malaise with his country, his family and most other people, his bitterness and his violence, ring true. The last of the four, Mess/Sgt. Strange, a redneck Texan with fixed and peculiar ideas about manhood who attempts to emulate Winch but does not have the insight or the skill, is a real and familiar American—sympathetically portrayed.

Not only the men but also the Southern women who flock to the Peabody Hotel to share the parties and the beds of the servicemen, the mythical city of Luxor, Tennessee which closely resembles Memphis; the feel of the Kentucky region where the AWOL Landers finds refuge, the flavor of St. Louis and Winch's unfaithful wartime wife, the war-worker family and its bleak, cheerless

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

Press, Economy & Other Woes

"Critics have also observed that those who report the news are likely to be inextricably mired in an incestuous relationship with those who make it, and in the United States that usually means with public officials, patricians, plutocrats, and a motley menagerie of peacocks and popinjays. When this became generally understood—during the 1960's—the myth of neutrality was debunked once and for all."

from "A Tale of Two Ef(ph)rons" by Kenneth Kolson

"We live in a society whose institutions are no longer capable of conferring meaning on our lives. Yet, since we are no longer absorbed by a quotidian struggle for survival, we need more than ever to feel that our lives have some meaning. We want to live right and need confirmation that we are spending our time well, that our efforts, our sufferings and our pleasures make sense, that we amount to something."

from "Beliefs and Verbal Vehemence" by Ernest van den Haag

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routine that has Strange's in-laws caught—all ring as true as the figures on Keats' urn, and as equally caught; forever fixed in time and place.

It was not until I began to read *Whistle* that I realized I have never forgotten *From Here To Eternity,* although it appeared in 1951. That was nearly thirty years ago, and at the time critics called it a regular hippopotamus of a book, stacked with stereotypes and unreal situations. They drew attention to his wavering style, which shifted from time to time, reflecting varying influences. Its enormous sales notwithstanding, the novel was not seriously discussed. Certainly I did not take it seriously—but I never forgot it. There was also a movie made, in 1953, that won an Academy Award, and served as a vehicle by which the sagging fortunes of Frank Sinatra were forever restored.

Certainly Jones was never hailed as a promising new talent, despite the enormous success of his first novel, as was Norman Mailer for his 1948 *The Naked and the Dead.* But Mailer's novel contained several features that enraptured the critics. For one thing, it exceeded in obscenities any previous general novel from a respectable house. For another, it exuded a disguised contempt for American fighting men, and it overlooked enlisted men from a lofty aerie. It featured a major-general from a proper background who was not only a crypto-fascist but a closet queen and it projected as hero a soft Harvard lieutenant who would have been at home on the staff of the *New York Times.* Jones, who capitalized the terms Regular Army and who loved his enlisted men, who considered officers burdens to be endured in an organization actually managed by sergeants, was—like the public—behind the times; unaware of changes in attitude that Mailer reflected as accurately as a weathervane.

While Mailer sunned himself in an acclaim that, to a great extent, still unaccountably lingers, Jones moved to Paris. He surmounted the challenge of later novels with admirable skill but never really succeeded in becoming a major literary lion. Mailer, who lived in New York—his natural ambience—distinguished himself by a serious crime, by appearing drunk in public on numerous occasions and by cocktail party fisticuffs, between potboilers and exhibitions. Yet Mailer was termed an artist and Jones a hack.

Jones labored under the critical handicap of not using his characters to illustrate a theory, or to ridicule this civilization. He wrote of people and scenes he knew, and of times that had pressed deeply into his mind. His women were real but his sex scenes were flat. He was at his best with friendships inside a group of men. These, despite the Mailers of this world, were untinted by homosexuality. His Army men were not even especially patriotic: they fought to keep faith with their comrades and to maintain their own self-respect.

The ending of *Whistle* is sad, but so is the end of youth. Only the Medal winner was left onstage, being exhibited on tour as a freak to raise War Bond sales by an Army theater group headed by Major Jerry Kurntz. Jones knew the changes the war brought. Jones' friend Willie Morris describes, in a foreword, how Jones toiled to end his trilogy. The final, indented section is taken, verbatim, from a tape Jones dictated in a Long Island hospital two days before his death—of congestive heart failure. That and other clues make it clear Sergeants Warden/Welsh/Winch was Jones, idealized. Of all his portraits, it is the most impressive.

Many other writers have tried to convey the American enlisted man; virtually all have failed because they looked downward. Jones was the real thing, and admired his friends. He did not count draftees—those self-pitying, involuntary heroes. His great achievement was to define the points of honor for his generation and group, which to them spelled the differences between real men and failures. In doing that and completing his trilogy, Jones forever outdistanced all the other writers regarding Americans in the Pacific. Many of his competitors had better technique and more education, but none as true a heart or better eye, nor a deeper knowledge that real honor means to stand fast whenever, or wherever, combat is joined. □

Empty Caricatures

John Casey: *An American Romance;* Atheneum; New York.

by Edward J. Walsh

Romantic love is of course a perennial theme of great literature. It was so when Shakespeare read medieval *romans* before producing *Romeo and Juliet;* it is so today, when John Casey has published his *An American Romance.* But between Shakespeare and Casey many years passed, and many cataclysms of popular culture, one of the unfortunate consequences being that while Shakespeare felt constrained to have his lovers properly married, Casey does not. To the contrary, he makes them do almost everything except marry. The critics have acclaimed him, and tell us that he has produced a great love story. But hopes that he has written a novel expressing values akin to Shakespeare's are unfounded.

Casey's title throws one off at once. "An American Romance," it seems, simply put, would generally summon visions of boy meeting girl, falling in love, writing notes, sending flowers, speaking to father. But Casey's novel of America is a crude, mutant joke. It is perhaps as dishearteningly American as the Greenwich Village singles scene; the significant difference is that Casey's lovers, Anya and Mac, spend most of their time copulating and psychoanalyz-

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ing each other in the hamlets of Iowa. It may be that Casey's setting of Iowa, suggestive as it is of the quintessentially American scene, is the sole redeeming feature of his novel.

There have always been more than enough novelists who are remembered as "stylists"; D.H. Lawrence is one, John Updike will probably be another. They make lasting though shallow impressions on literature on the basis of their vivid imagery and flowing sentence structure, but certainly not on the basis of their contributions to wisdom. Conversely, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's historical novels may be ponderous in places, but they express a majestically intelligent vision of the world, that forces itself on the reader with visceral, rough-hewn eloquence and power. John Casey, however endeavors to be a stylist first, as Lawrence was. He therefore writes such lines as:

> "Lying in bed afterward, Mac thought that periods of time once lived through became spheres set in motion—altering each other's orbits, charged with negative and positive memory, discharging at different rates, obscuring each other, some dull and large masses of a somber influence, some bright and small, apparently emitting the new order of energy . . ."

That kind of stuff permeates his novel, and bores his readers. Perhaps the writer of the great American romance ought to be allowed some stylistic self-indulgence. But Casey wallows in it, and the paragraphs and pages fly by before Mac has gotten out of bed. If anything, it detracts from the author's style, because, as with any writer, style is an uneven quality. Sooner or later it shifts, and the stylist must come back to earth, and get his story moving.

It is not Casey's style, however, but his story that makes his book cheap and trashy. Mac and Anya meet, go to bed, move in together, and, in the pioneer tradition, head west to Iowa, to join an amateur theatre troupe led by Andrew, a homosexual who admires Anya's wit.

Ensconced in Iowa, Anya and Mac live together amid reminiscences of sleazy trysts of years past. Anya, proceeding with her play arranging, sodomizes a television director out of artistic frustration, and finds that "this man . . . had initiated her in a way, released a shadowy presence in her, at a depth far below her irritation, below her sneering at him, below her laughing at herself, below any of her ironic amusements." Mac, cast as a down-to-earth traditional type, reverts to farming, leaving the ironic amusements to Anya and Andrew.

This goes on, a few plays are produced, and we are introduced to Peewee, a lost waif of Haight-Ashbury caliber, who quickly gets involved in a *menage a trois* with Anya and Mac. She does absolutely nothing for the next one hundred pages, until appearing in a grotesquely pornographic movie produced by Mercks, a college playboy who encourages Anya to produce her film, "Iowa Girl," her triumph and the subject of the final chapter.

After considerable soul-searching, throughout which Anya is tempted by the "permanence" she has found in Iowa, she gives it up and returns, alone, to New York for bigger and better things in filmdom, leaving Mac with the pigs and chickens. We're left wondering if he ends up following her.

It may be that the freewheeling sex, the farming, and the theatrical projects are intended to transform Anya and Mac in some profoundly spiritual way. Mac certainly finds satisfaction in becoming an expert farmer and handyman. Anya develops her skills as a director, but at the end it's hard to see what they are supposed to have accomplished, or learned. They, and all Casey's personages are stark, empty caricatures, meant to represent some stereotype of the Age: Anya, the smart-aleck sophisticated brat from Radcliffe; Mac, the strong, silent Army veteran and Ivy League hockey star—both lifted, it seems, intact from Eric Segal. The others, Peewee, Mercks, and Henniker, Anya's intellectually burnt-out ex-boyfriend, and Tassie, her old college roommate, jaded by money and marriage, are nothing but embodiments of familiar modern neuroses. Their interaction is on the level of wise-guy one-upmanship, and even Mac and Anya do little but hurl remarks of measured sarcasm at each other. All of Casey's stylistic gifts cannot save them, or us.

The Americana is injected, to little avail. Casey knows the American landscape, as his endless descriptions of castrating pigs, rescuing stray cows, and house-building prove. But the story he imposes on it makes it seem weird and alien. His tale is totally detached from a setting in time—there's never a mention of who is president or the Vietnam War, though one senses that Anya is disgusted by the fact that Mac was in the Army. We can only guess at the setting in time, but the rampant amorality of the book, from start to finish, makes it all familiar enough.

It is the spotlighting of America that is perhaps most painful, if not insulting, about Casey's book. He tells a dreary tale of empty lives, people engaging in un-

"An American Romance is a major work, a finely detailed novel of character and sensibility."

—*Saturday Review*

"An American Romance is crafted with an academic's zeal for ideas . . . Can a man write a feminist novel? It looks that way to me."

—*Ms.*

"Yet Anya's dynamic overpowers simple generational physics. She is archetypal, not bourgeois . . . she avoids the career-girl cameo totally, so that, for example, she is able to sodomize, heroically, a producer for a favor. This is the frontier spirit attaining escape velocity."

—*Village Voice*

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ending disjointed conversations, and sex meant to be nothing but educational—and calls it "American." In titling his novel "An American Romance," Casey has aimed at epic scale. One justifiably expects that he will reach it—and more, one should expect something evocative of America, in a, well, a *timeless* sense, expressive of values that are familiarly American: honesty, wholeheartedness, generosity, even devoutness. Such are truly the stuff of America, as countless historians and chroniclers of American rituals have told us countless times. And an "American" novelist need not be mawkish or Rotary Club-straight: Flannery O'Connor was one, Thomas Wolfe was another.

Instead, we get critics calling John Casey's Iowa soap opera "a major literary event." It is high time to pause, at such deafening hype, and wonder if critics have gone back to writing reviews on the basis of publishers' press releases. For John Casey's style is not a strong suit, but it is probably his best. Title writing is certainly not his forte. Unfortunately, Theodore Dreiser preempted "An American Tragedy," forcing Casey to try something else. But *An American Romance* belies itself. The American romance is still to be written. □

Commendables

The Traps of Good Will

Gaylin, Glasser, Marcus, and Rothman: *Doing Good: The Limits of Benevolence;*
Pantheon Books; New York.

by Nancy Mohrbacher

This book is an example of the limitations of any one discipline to explain a phenomenon fully. Each of the four authors—a psychiatrist, historian, writer and lawyer—falls short of dealing comprehensively with the complex problem of society's responsibility to its poor and helpless. However, the sum total of their efforts appears as a well-balanced reflection.

Willard Gaylin, co-founder and president of the Institute of Society, Ethics and Life Sciences, explains the function and development of caring in human beings. Drawing from psychology and biology, he comes to the conclusion that ". . . to be cared for is essential for the capacity to be caring"—in that the quality of caring one receives in one's early years greatly determines our ability to care for others in the future. Dr. Gaylin extends this need to care and be cared for to society-at-large: it is necessary for the healthy functioning of society that its members take responsibility for the poor, aged and handicapped. In the case of the poor, he suggests that society "find ways to eliminate the category." He concludes: "Those of you versed in the economic and political mechanisms must come up with a solution."

Steven Marcus, a specialist on nineteenth-century literature, introduces the harsh light of reality to the "technological problem" of eliminating poverty. He gives examples of disastrous consequences resulting from honest efforts to meet the needs of the poor. In eighteenth century England, a guaranteed income was instituted based on the price of bread. The results were that, with the possibility of starvation gone, employers lowered workers' wages below subsistence. Subsequent mass-dependency and loss of self-respect lowered morale, and productivity declined. The antidote to this system, the workhouse, was inaugurated in 1834. The workhouse was designed to humiliate and stigmatize those who entered it. Families were separated, rigid rules were enforced which severed all contact with the outside world. Even in death one was relegated to the paupers' graveyard. Marcus concludes: ". . . we can degrade people by caring for them and we can degrade them by not caring for them and in matters such as these there are neither simple answers nor simple solutions."

Historian David Rothman digs into the motives and methods of the reformers of the more recent past. He examines the dilemma of balancing the beneficiaries' "needs" and "rights" as he contrasts the Progressive reform movement of the last hundred years with the current fashion. Indeed, it was not so long ago that the caseworker was thought to be "practically a member of the family [who taught] them lessons of cleanliness and decency, of truth and integrity," and the goal of making over immigrants in the American image was taken for granted. Although he never questions the Progressives' good intentions, he sees the unequivocal power the reformers were given over their charges as corrupting. He finds, as Lionel Trilling once stated:

> "Some paradox in our nature leads us, once we have made our fellow men the objects of our enlightened interest, to go on to make them the objects of our pity, then of our wisdom, ultimately of our coercion."

Mr. Rothman sees the turning point in attitudes as 1966, the year that Martin Luther King's empassioned pleas for brotherhood were being drowned out by the "separationists'" formulations of "black power." Suddenly the concept of the common welfare gave way to the adversarial approach of special interest groups and the prevalent feeling that all altruism is suspect. The answer, he thinks, lies somewhere between respecting the rights of the helpless and recognizing their needs, although he has little faith in human nature to strike the proper balance.

Ira Glasser, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, strongly disagrees with Mr. Rothman's assessment. He feels that society's dependents

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can be adequately cared for, without infantilizing or coercing them, by merely guaranteeing them their proper rights. Mr. Glasser's argument, although punctuated with heart-rending examples, lacks the delicacy of touch of the other three.

Although the four authors do not attempt to homogenize their views, there is a current that runs throughout the book: "doing good" is a natural and commendable human impulse, but translating this into social programs and policies is a thorny problem fraught with innumerable complications and uncertainties. □

Kershner's Resolution

Howard E. Kershner: ***How to Stay in Love With One Woman for 70 Years;***
Northwood Institute; Cedar Hill, Texas.

To accomplish it, one first and foremost must have an ample opportunity to remain on this earth long enough. The Good Lord has blessed Dr. Kershner with exactly this circumstance. He thus has acquired both the necessary expertise and the chance to jot down and publish his impressions and advice at the age of 86, and he has done it with an amazing freshness of feeling and sensitivity. Dr. Kershner—an author, scholar and civic leader, decorated by many foreign countries with their high orders of merit—is an authority on Christian economic doctrines. Together with his religious allegiance, he admits a rather intense interest in the realm of the reciprocal attraction of the genders which has been his sincere preoccupation since the age of seven. Subsequently, at the age of 14, he fell in love, and that was it. During the ensuing 70 years he observed that ". . .all of one good man or woman is far more than bits and pieces of many." While we would never suggest coercion, some educators and moralists may want to make Dr Kershner's observations required reading.

The superbly engaging nature of Dr. Kershner's emotionality induces the suspicion that the modern psychoanalytic approach to the mysteries of sex is just an exploitative hoax: if it suffices to be normal and healthy in one's impulses and preferences to achieve happiness in one's love life—why call the analyst's couch a help? □

Lundborg's Private Saga

Louis B. Lundborg: ***Up To Now;***
Norton; New York.

A dissonance may be detected between the words *private* and *saga,* as epics are seldom matters of privacy. It is, however, peculiarly American to turn very personal circumstances into topics of much larger significance and interest, even when great literature is not the objective. It is especially effective to cast these circumstances against the American West at the turn of the century, and during the first half of this century, when the burgeoning of human energies and opportunities created an ambience from which fascinating careers blossomed. Mr. Lundborg's autobiography begins in a log cabin in Montana and takes him (and us) to the chairman's office of the Bank of America, the world's largest bank. His account of the social and personal propellants of the process that turned the son of a Swedish immigrant farmer into the Chairman of the Board reads like an exercise in Americanism—a wholesome ideology that is never called ideology by ideologists, especially those who hate its motivations and its astonishing achievements. Mr. Lundborg may lack a scholar's refined judgment on the causal factors and the more complicated ingredients of contemporary history, but his moral instincts and his theorizing are proper and engaging. □

In Focus

Gittelson's Half-Hearted Effort

Natalie Gittelson: ***Dominus—A Woman Looks at Men's Lives;***
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.; New York.

The image of a henpecked husband, or a grotesquely timid suitor, or an addle-headed lover, who is manipulated and cuckolded by an enterprising female, has belonged, since time immemorial, to literature, theater, farce. In our era of cheaply popularized sociopsychologism, it is called liberation of women, emasculation or role-playing, and is ascribed to the surge of the women's movement. Ms. Gittelson wrote a book to explain why it is so. The book commendably attempts objectivity and insight and carries a convincing introductory observation that: "When femininity becomes a matter for conjecture, so too must masculinity." Deplorably, it is written in a standard *New York Times Magazine* journalese-oracular prose, thereby losing its only chance to be persuasive by means of irony and witticism.

Ms. Gittelson seems to confirm, or even feebly postulates, the ultimate nonsense inherent in the current popcultural scene, namely that men should "redefine" their manhood, "raise" the "consciousness," engage in anti-feminist backlash. To anyone with a sense of masculine dignity, such a precept smacks of homosexual response. By acting so, men would acknowledge a fictitious defeat of the entire gender, while, actually, we deal with the casualty of one generation, or even just a bunch of masculine misfits whom Ms. Gittelson chose as her statistical specimen, displaying a sort of reportorial astigmatism. Is the *Dominus*—the Master, the Man—really emerging from the pages of her book as representative for the contemporary male as she wishes us to believe? In describing him, Ms. Gittelson, in spite

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of all her allegations to the contrary, tends to confuse the need for human sensitivities with the need for civil rights. In short, her perceptiveness notwithstanding, she sees a better world in an impulse to legislate equalities—thus endorsing the basic error of feminism. What's different in her book is her attempt to understand men even if disagreeing with their demand, or wish, for idiosyncrasy. Ms. Gittelson seeks objectivity and fairness by stressing the commonality, or "humanness." Good enough as a proof of good will, but, again, another fundamental feminist mistake as both the commonality and humanness of the man-woman interrelation is in the *difference* and its consequences—a God- and nature-given paradox which no social furor will turn into a no-nonsense regulation. For Ms. Gittelson, a man displaying goodness and understanding for a woman is an ideological brother. But kindness existed before *Ms. Magazine* proclaimed its compulsory bureaucratization, and it might have conditioned the human existences to a larger degree than sexual fantasies. The falsest premise of a well-intentioned book like *Dominus* is that it assumes, under the onslaught and blare of shrill, media-fanned "revolutions"—that the contemporary woman *must* hate men to be a woman, that even the "traditional" woman has hated men, but being unable to voice her hatred adequately and efficiently, was always taken for someone else than she really was.

Nothing indicated that it has ever been so, or that it is so now. □

Spackman's Honorable Toy

W.M. Spackman: ***An Armful of Warm Girl;***
Knopf; New York.

Certainly, the front-of-the-jacket vignette is delightful. So is the title. But that's about it. Mr. Spackman's novelette confirms that a charming literary bubble is the most difficult literary feat under the sun. He tried, and failed—let's add: honorably. What should have been an etude in stylization was in some way vitiated by the unintentional boisterousness which sneaked in the lieu of mordant irony, and stultified the syncopation of innuendos. The novel and its message were perhaps conceived as the American *Les Liaisons dangereuses,* seductiveness *à la Americaine;* maybe a subtle satire, or mock nostalgia. But Nicholas Romney, Mr. Spackman's version of an irresistible and tender senior banker, father and bemused divorcé, does not seem to understand delicate situations and gentle traps of life the way King David, Goethe and Nabokov did—that is through refined, often tormented, intuition that only appears as light-mindedness. He is too beefy, and too limited in his repertory of responses to be convincing and appealing—to us readers, of course, because the fancies of the women whom he attracts are, as usual, unfathomable and beyond discussion. The style in which Mr. Spackman presents his tribulations is that of chatty pointilism, which makes it difficult to discern the author's finer points as there is a marked difference between a painting and a dialogue. This book has been hailed by critics as the ultimate in modern pastiche, a fond allusion to better times and styles. What this book evidences is that Mr. Spackman's mere intention to write about sentimental aloneness, about feelings of wanting one particular woman who is specified by an individual set of shapes, appeals, perfumes and body temperatures, and to locate his tale in the early fifties when those components of a *femme* still had a meaning, not a social image, triggered a responsive chord in the critics and the public. Now, when the "old ways" as a substance of sexuality are out, America seems to miss and long for suaveness, urbanity and multiformity of what once was called the affairs of the heart. But even the critics who praised Mr. Spackman's novel stopped short of saying it openly and squarely. □

Winn's Impossibility of Winning

Marie Winn: ***The Plug-In Drug;***
Viking; New York.

Whereas the bulk of TV criticism has been aimed at sex, violence and inanity—Miss Winn attacks the entire medium. All (or almost all) the ills of what she labels "the television generation" are attributed to TV. Network executives should be gratified to learn of their pervasive power. Among the societal ailments Miss Winn lays at the doorstep of television are: declining SAT scores, counterculture aberrations, drugs, increased violence, promiscuity, and alterations in brain function. Although she has a degree in neither medicine nor sociology, Miss Winn carefully explains her suppositions in both fields; all the while admitting that there is no *real* proof available, but television is in her opinion the only explanation which ties together the various unpleasant phenomena of the '60s and '70s.

The vicious cycle begins with "plopping the kids in front of *Sesame Street*" in order to obtain temporary peace. A few years later, the kids want to do nothing but watch TV. Families' daily schedules are timed by TV programs and worked around "the kids' viewing requirements."

Miss Winn examines two sets of families: those who have never owned a television set and those who have stopped their viewing for a period of time. Families who have never owned a set simply find pleasure in other pursuits. Those who refrained from using their television for a period of months invariably reported initial "withdrawal symptoms," then an idyllic time of family togetherness, more efficient use of the day, and a greater desire to read good books. They also invariably turned the television back on.

The upshot of the author's analysis is that excessive television watching is inadvisable for both children and adults. It is an interesting statement, perhaps a little obscured by Miss Winn's evangelistic fervor, but beyond any doubt—with no chance to win in our time and society. □

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Waste of Money

Krantz's Marionettes in a Puddle

Judith Krantz: *Scruples;*
Crown; New York.

Seventh Avenue symbolizes American fashion the way Hollywood symbolizes the American cinema. At the opposite ends of the continent both are pivotal in molding aesthetic choices, dreams and aspirations. Fashion's ideological organ, the New York based *Women's Wear Daily,* perverts popular preferences through manipulation of marionettes, most of which happen to be real people. Both centers affect our way of spending money, the manner in which we live, and with whom (and how) we fall in love. Whether it was the curvaceous, wise-cracking blonde and her strong, silent companion of the thirties, or the sexually ambivalent, verging on androgynous prototypes of the seventies, the interaction of these fashion centers is pronounced. Fashion—in its broadest sense—as a purveyor of *lifestyle* has never been stronger. And this is all Ms. Krantz's novel is about.

As an exemplar of today's trashy pop-novel, *Scruples* is as good a guide to what the country—or a chunk of it—wants as any other. As incarnated in its heroine, Billy Winthrop Ikehorn Orsini, it wants it all: sex, money, career, love, power and to eat Lucullan feasts and remain pleasantly gaunt. Billy, an ugly duckling turned swan who marries first for money, then for love, creates Scruples, the world's most lavish boutique, which combines the tastes and style of both New York and California in a mecca for the frantic, never satiated consumer. As a tribute to both sex and money—the exclusive concerns of both *Scruples* and Scruples—the book indulges in extravagant descriptions for a reader bent on vicarious pleasures. As a *roman à clef,* both the inhabitants of the New York fashion and Hollywood movie worlds are enthusiastically—if crudely—limned. In spite of all their forays through the wonderland of sin-and-excess, however, the major characters ultimately find happiness in straight arrow sexual orientation and the delights of monogamy. In effect, they all live happily ever after, which suggests that Judith Krantz, an energetic lady writing a sure-fire best seller, knows a lot about how to jump into a puddle of existential filth and come out relatively clean. □

The American Scene

The Midyear's Great Loss

Max Ascoli died on January 1, 1978. He was the founder and editor of *The Reporter* magazine, a journal of courage and distinction. He came to America from Italy, a young liberal scholar and anti-Fascist, and fell into a life-long love affair with the country. He became President Roosevelt's ardent supporter, but through the years he evolved a keen pro-American instinct which, blended with his intellectual powers and European experiences, led him away from liberal dogmatism. He saw the civilization he venerated and loved eroding in the '60s. He perceived the paradox of degeneration to be the result of self-injected venom. Long before Senator Jackson, he said, during a friendly discussion: "I am a liberal but not a fool . . ." He supported the war effort in Vietnam, and this was enough to render him a non-person for the liberal Establishment. A great editor, who introduced in *The Reporter* a whole generation of journalists, publicists and writers, he lived to see his opinions blackballed by the New York liberal press. Let's hope that, proud and sensitive as he was, he did not die disenchanted, bitter at having loved a reality which did not deserve so much devotion. □

Change of Heart

"If a SALT treaty is defeated and an arms race ensues, if detente collapses and ideological war begins, if the United States becomes sufficiently aroused to mobilize its economic resources for full scale competition with the Soviet Union, the United States almost certainly will prevail. Our economic output is twice that of the Soviet Union. We have the capacity to force the Soviets into a military spending race that would deprive their urban middle classes of consumer items, and their lower classes of food, with unpredictable consequences for the stability of Soviet society."

Nicely put—a clean, meaty, logical, flawless, robust, impeccably substantiated by reason and fact program of geopolitical strategy. Morally and politically sound, to boot. Who is demanding it? Philip Crane? Daniel Moynihan? Solzhenitsyn? That old cold-warrior Harry Truman during a seance? No, it comes from the July issue of *The New Republic,* the same liberal organ that for 30 years has ironically sneered at any concept of coercive showdown with the Soviet Union.

The American University

In an essay entitled *Ten Years On,* David Riesman, the renowned Harvard social scientist, remarks on "the higher learning in America since the events of 1968." We can read there a sentence:

"The parents of the protesters were generally liberal or even radical. Several studies have shown that many campus activists were acting on behalf of parental ideals and with parental sympathy."

We can clearly see now, from the perspective provided by time, that the

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moral and social authority of the American University was destroyed by what happened during the sixties. The American University used to be an object of envy for the rest of the world, unrivaled in both its level of scholarship (witness the number of American Nobel Prize laureates of the last 50 years) as well as in its collegiate atmosphere (as measured by the degree of respect and privilege granted to the students). Professor Riesman, hardly a non-liberal, makes it unequivocal who is to blame for the reckless annihilation of a common value—perhaps an irrevocable loss for us all.

What Happened to ERA?

What happened to ERA is a most telling illustration of what has happened to American political morality in the era of liberal brainwashing.

After the amendment failed to be adopted in keeping with the customary constitutional procedure, the House voted to extend the deadline for its ratification. But, at the same time, it forbade the states that had ratified it to withdraw that ratification.

Up to now, such a method of reaching a political goal was described as totalitarian, and our liberal press called it tyranny in Chile or South Korea. In Washington, it is called the progressive fight against the lack of women's rights—according to the formula *á la mode.*

The Mini-Orgy of Liberal Jingoism

From its dawn as "the New World," America stirred the imagination of Europe. Then, as a society and a nation, America started doing extraordinary things for itself, and the world became fascinated and envious. Then, America welcomed every traveler, every inquiry and every scientific or reportorial research. Then, America created a marvelous, captivating literature which in its own right conquered the world and endowed it with deep insights into the American reality, society and character. Then came the movies, and the world became imbued with both America's image and fantasies—a visual saturation on an unprecedented scale.

This constant and overwhelming flow of information has produced a special abundance of knowledge about America. This phenomenon is routinely overlooked by Americans, so when put on display it causes a sometimes unwelcome surprise. But the fact remains that if Eskimos and Albanians can with good reason tell Americans: "You know nothing about us," Americans would be presumptuous when telling the Bulgarians or Indonesians: "You know nothing about us." In point of fact, the Venezuelans, Swiss and Moroccans who read books and go to movies know so much about America that it would make many Americans uncomfortable.

The most profound lore of America comes from non-Americans. It would be difficult to challenge what de Toqueville knew about America with: "What could he know about us that we didn't know? How can an uppity French aristocrat understand us, our institutions, our mores?" Moreover, we can't recall any vivid protests in the liberal press when Sartre and Marcuse held forth on America's alleged calamities in the sixties. No one would have dared then. Neither the America-firsters from the *New York Times* nor the love-it-or-leave-it patriots from Greenwich Village, got up to ask: "Now, Mr. Sartre/Marcuse, what do you know about America?" The message of those two rheumatic European leftists was received as critique, and a valid one to boot.

They all rose, however, like wounded lions against Mr. Solzhenitsyn's Harvard address. The mere fact that Solzhenitsyn has countless times expressed his admiration, gratitude and respect for America and its historical accomplishments, suddenly counted for nothing. He dared to criticize the new realities of America created by the liberals and the Liberal Culture during the past two decades. He did it trenchantly and from an anti-liberal position. The *New York Times,* spokesman for the species, immediately ran a lead editorial, entitled: "The Obsession of Solzhenitsyn." Archibald MacLeish, in his otherwise restrained and tactful polemics in *Time,* nevertheless assumed that Solzhenitsyn: ". . . knows little of our American lives or of ourselves."

The most perverse—unwittingly, of course, as this sort of perversion requires intelligence—summation of the episode can be found in the title of a newspaper column by a certain Mary McGrory: "Solzhenitsyn doesn't love us." Poor Ms. McGrory. It is beyond her grasp that Solzhenitsyn just does not like her.

The Invincible Strategy

In an article published not long ago by *The Wall Street Journal* and entitled: "Failure of Nerve—or Intellect?", the cutest of our intellectual magicians, Professor Arthur Schlesinger wrote:

> "Look at Indochina today. The Communist states are at each other's throats. Communist Vietnam, the country that our official fancy portrayed in 1964-70 as the stooge of Communist China, has today the most tense relations with Communist China. The security of the United States is totally unaffected by the communization of Vietnam."

Professor Schlesinger sounds as if this outcome is what the anti-war liberals consciously and programmatically anticipated from the very beginning of the conflict. It looks as if Schlesinger and his consorts had meticulously planned this Machiavellian foreign policy coup. Why did they tell us nothing about this devilishly clever stratagem 10 years ago? Why did they keep repeating that it was the murderous American military-industrial complex and the insane ambitions of American politicians which made peace impossible, and keep assuring us that those benevolent and loving Orientals wished only to be left alone to live in peace among themselves? If they had only told us that they had a better way of serving the interests of the United States, or that they were plotting such an in-

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genious scheme to win without going into jungles and dying in booby traps—we all would have been on their side.

Time's *Ethical Pirouette*

Time magazine's attitude toward crime has long been recognized as the cutest journalistic weathervane in America. When the liberal dogma blossomed in the ethical mud of the early '70s, *Time* was the first to argue that bestiality could be explained by social conditions and that we should embrace murderers, who are our brothers in psychoanalysis and should provide them with rehabilitative facilities. At that time, we kept repeating that one is responsible for one's deeds, and that the society must defend itself by harsh means if it is to remain free and civilized. Today, most Americans seem to agree with us. Therefore, *Time* recently ran an "essay" entitled "On Crime and Much Harder Punishment," in which one Lance Morrow admitted that, indeed, since America's streets, schools and even her barricaded homes have become bloody battlefields, perhaps it would be best to return to more severe punishment of convicted criminals. No capital punishment (God forbid!)—*Time's* subservience to the liberal sham wouldn't allow such an iconoclasm—since the electric chair is not a reliable deterrent (a majority of experts claim that it is). "Within civilized limits, speed and certainty of punishment represent an approachable ideal," states Mr. Morrow.

Time's comprehensive methodology is beautifully laid bare in this "essay." It is a despicable dialectics of human and public affairs. *Time* admits that things have been very bad, recently, but if we try this or that then things will be all right, fine, perhaps even super. What "this or that" is depends on what *Time* sniffs in people's moods and attitudes. Of course, the possibility that *Time* may have contributed to the mess by supporting ideas and issues that made things bad, and which *Time* now decries in its "essays," matters little to *Time.* A new trend is on; let's embrace it in a way that pleases everybody. *Time's* listless objectivity never clashes with its liberal conscience.

At this time, retributive justice seems to be the best approach to the problem of crime in America. The elimination of the principle of retribution from the judiciary process has been tearing apart the fabric of our society for nearly two decades. But only *now* has *Time* noticed that our "social contract" is imperiled. However, *Time* still fails to confess that modern liberalism (*Time* included) has made this "social contract" meaningless by exempting from it the "dispossessed" and "oppressed." For years, *Time* has preached that the bad guys can live according to a morality custom-tailored by *Time* magazine. It has always been a fashionable morality, cut to the current socio-psychological fads. So we now have the world according to *Time.* Let's begin the fall season with some new styles in crime and punishment from *Time* magazine's boutique—ethical obligations are once again on sale.

A Marxist Wunderkind

The Progressive, a socialist monthly, brings to its readers an emotional story entitled "Reflections: On Repressive Tolerance" by one David Harvey, an English immigrant who came to this country to earn his daily bread, and at a fairly advanced age discovered the revelation of Marxism. Judging by his "Gee! Wow!" enthusiasm, one would infer that Mr. Harvey is the owner of a mind only slightly trained in intellectual activities. He freely admits that shortly after arriving in America:

> ". . . I happened to read Karl Marx. He placed great emphasis on the 'contradictions of capitalism,' and that caught my attention. I read on, intrigued. And the more I read, the more it seemed to make sense . . ."

Mr. Harvey finally states that he "had never felt saner in [his] life" and expresses enormous surprise that other people in America do not share his fervor for Marxism. Having come to the conclusion that Marxist faith qualifies one for the lions, he even frets about his job, but adds reassuringly, "Fortunately, I obtained tenure a year before all that happened."

At this point, we must bring up the ultimate revelation: in accordance with his aptitude for mental efforts, Mr. Harvey is a professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

And Now: Dead Rock!

The press has brought the news that one Mona Claywood Moore, 27, of San Diego, has undergone cosmetic surgery on the bottom half of her face to make her look like the late Janis Joplin. Her chin and jaws have been reconstructed and implants inserted to make the job complete. She'll soon have a second operation to fix her nose and cheeks. Armed with powers of impersonation, she will then go on the road to perpetuate the message of the '60s rock subculture.

Behind this "little reconstruction"—as she calls it—is a certain Danny O'Day, rock concert promoter. He does not intend to stop with Joplin; several deceased greats of the Amplified Protest Era are scheduled for the same revival. The American culture will be everlastingly indebted to Mr. O'Day's unintentional sense of the sardonic, though, we suspect, any attempt to explain to him what sarcasm means would be futile.

Douglas MacArthur's Deficiency

With the publication of *American Caesar,* by William Manchester, the time has come for General MacArthur to be dissected by the "responsible" and "conscientious" critics of our day. The tone of the inquiry seems to have been set by a certain Merle Miller in *Book World:*

> "MacArthur was a brilliant man, though his knowledge of much beyond the military sciences was negligible. One would hesitate to have engaged him in a discussion of philosophy, literature, medieval or renaissance history, or the restoration comedy." □

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Stage

Clowning with Survival

Alan Ayckbourn: *Ten Times Table;* Globe Theatre, London.

Alan Ayckbourn is nowadays regarded on both English-speaking sides of the Atlantic, as the supreme technician of the modern comedy scene. His latest offering, entitled *Ten Times Table,* has other ambitions. It aspires to convince the viewer about the socio-moral virtues that derive from victorious bungling, allegedly an arch-British specialty. Mr. Ayckbourn sets out to suggest, in a quasi-symbolic manner, that the magic exorcism for England's contemporary ills and sores may be concealed in such a philosophy of life and politics. There's something to it, as the British, through a good chunk of history, have always made fun of themselves, trying to convince the world of their good-humored naiveté and dimwittedness, sprinkled with snobbish poses and supercilious idiosyncrasies, while, in the meantime, conquering or controlling a good chunk of the same world to their advantage.

This time, the story is about their own domestic survival. Aykbourn constructs a generally static anecdote that drags through two acts about a provincial set of social doers who sit at a table in a shabby hotel restaurant and plan an historical pageant to bring back a little national glory to their sleepy town. This noble design is to be frustrated and abused by non-English extremism: an attempt by a neurotic leftist and a psychopathic fascist to take advantage of the situation and promote their goals, but, in the climactic last act, they end up eliminating one another, defeated by the good-humored English bungling, dimwittedness and naiveté. It is also meant as a gentle satire on socio-ideological polarization, and if the contemporary Englishman believes that *that* may be a metaphoric solution to his country's quite real problems, we can only wish that this kind of happy survival will come true.

However, the leftist is much more of an idiot than the authentic collectivists in the trade unions and Labour Party's current team of extremists seem to be. The rightist's tics announce his ideology by manic facial expressions, exactly like the bad, mad Germans in *Hogan's Heroes* used to do, and this time it seems as if Mr. Ayckbourn misses by far both the comedic and the literary point. He populates the stage with familiar characters and paraphernalia: a very hoary, very eccentric lady, a kind-hearted fool as personification of common sense, a sex-starved middle-aged spouse, a grotesque masquerade and inevitable pratfalls. The final limbo, full of shooting, smoke and slapstick, is supposed to herald that happy days are here again, and if not already then very soon. (ES) □

Screen

Stylization, Charmlessness and Kitsch

***The Last Waltz;* directed by Martin Scorsese; United Artists.**
***Heaven Can Wait;* directed by Warren Beatty and Buck Henry; written by Warren Beatty and Elaine May; Paramount Pictures.**
***Grease;* directed by Randal Kleiser; written by Bronte Woodward; Paramount Pictures.**

by Eric Shapearo

Once upon a time, Armstrong was style (and bonhomie), Bessie Smith was style (and social poignancy), Ellington was style (and irony and finesse and dynamics of the musical imagery). The Band, a most venerated rock ensemble, whose last concert is the content and substance of Scorsese's audio-visual-poetic commentary—is all stylization. Clothes, faces, countenances of the people in The Band and around it either derive from or adopt the principle of imitation as the source of art. The Band is surrounded by a host of musical supporters whose most elevated artistic goal seems instant impact through pretense. Thus, drug addicts pose as weather-beaten cowboys, a rat-like Bob Dylan molds himself into a folk tribune in a Mississippi gambler's attire. A whirlwind of stylized artistry and tonality emerges from the stage and naturally saturates the audience which—as does every audience—indulges in the raptures of identification. What occurs is a giant sham: a fashionable trend is presented as style, being in fact just stylization, that is, a shallow and infertile adoption of styles.

By now, we know it as homily that everything which was transformed into America's most potent cultural message comes from the musicality that crystallized along with the lower course of the Mississippi River and its delta. American native music in all its variations is based on the novel treatment of the musical matter that emerged in the South, mostly New Orleans, branched out everywhere in the country, and blended countless influences and traditions. Rock'n'roll, as we know it now, is primarily this music's urban version dating from the '50s, but in the '60s it degenerated into an idio-

Eric Shapearo reviews spectacles for the Chronicles.

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syncratic harmonic sophistication with a claim to an all-encompassing synthesis. "All together is rock—" the drummer of The Band, who assumes the role of an ideological spokesman, says at one point. With the same cognitive accuracy he can maintain that a hamburger subsumes all the culinary tastes of America.

One listens to The Band and realizes the incoherent chemistry of hard rock. It pushes tonal intensification at the price of depersonification; in fact, it promulgates a solipsistic performer, but gives him less access to his own individuality than the collective improvisation in jazz, let alone the jazz instrumental solo. It abandons spontaneity and introduces in its stead feverishness and frenzy. It purports to be the efficient dispatcher of social signals, but does not know how to individualize their touching texture, thus turning them into political sloganeering, spurious and uncogenial. In *The Last Waltz,* Bob Dylan and Neil Diamond sing protest songs against the rich and powerful, and songs of solidarity with the poor and powerless. However, one has a sense that they are self-appointed commissars of the sensitivities of the deprived and exploited, that they only pretend to be high-strung humanists while being, in reality, greedy millionaires; that there is no true mission in Bob Dylan, the dyspeptic cherub-Shylock, but an avidity of success and political obduracy. The Band promulgates skepticism and suffuses the air with franticality; it sings of coolness and altruism, and on their faces there is perspiration and meanness. In its heyday, jazz was also all social protest, but the misery of the blues (Ma Rainey, Ida Cox, Billie Holiday) kept so close to the genuine suffering of human beings that they originated a unique artistic message whose significance will never fade. This accounts, perhaps, for the mere fact that whenever I hunt for old records in a local Salvation Army store, I never can find copies of even mass editions of Fletcher Henderson, Jimmy Lunceford, or Bunk Johnson, but the boxes are crammed with Rolling Stones, Jimmy Hendrix, The Doors, Blood, Sweat & Tears, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Credence Clearwater, the 5th Dimension. What does it mean? It means that people do not keep rock art as they used to keep Armstrong and Stokowski.

Admittedly, all those rock stars have belted out their music with tremendous and impressive energy during the last fifteen years. However, the musical, and any other message, must have been disproportionately meager to the input of vehemence. In spite of its decibels, it evaporates—while Mozart's flute and Satchmo's humming will stay forever.

* * *

It is a remake of the 1941 movie *Here Comes Mr. Jordan,* directed by Alexander Hall, written by Sidney Buchman, and acted by Robert Montgomery and Claude Rains. As much as the original was charming, entertaining and witty, *Heaven Can Wait* is charmless, dull and flat. It drags its socio-intellectual insights from the upper-class Hollywood populism for rich media executives, and tries hard to convert newspaper headlines about nuclear industry's laissez-faireism, or air-pollution ethics, into Everyman's issues.

However, it contains a question of the largest cultural dimension, one that requires volumes and treatises to ponder the answer. Why has filmmaking, having climbed to the technical acme of performing, and formal perfection of picture and sound, lost the grip on human souls that it held for half-a-century? Why did leaving the movie house once mean living for nights and days with acquired images, purchased for cents, or dollars; while leaving it today means an almost immediate forgetting of what flickered before our eyes minutes ago? The victims of this inexplicable disease are the young: it's impossible to explain to them why the progressivism of Beatty and consorts leaves them cold, whereas the populism of Frank Capra and John Ford had the magic capacity to move to tears even the fiercest anti-populists. This magic has gone, Hollywood of today is no longer the dream factory—or evil incarnate as it was perceived by the liberal intellectual of the '30s, '40s, '50s—and with every year this evolution proves to be more of a cultural catastrophe. The new generation pays $3 for a few insipid jokes and an everlasting feeling of maudlin emptiness now created by the Hollywood directors, scriptwriters, actors—whom the critics for the national magazines indulge in calling "brainy."

* * *

The humanoids on screen can barely articulate speech into cogent sentences. Emotions expressible by words seem to them a distant achievement of a future civilization; for the moment they rely upon grimaces and gestures. According to *Grease,* the new cinematic musical, they represent the teenagers of the mid-fifties. Chronologically, they thus should be the parents of the teenagers who these days crowd the movie houses to see *Grease.* This is not easy to believe. The image must have been flattened either by Hollywood professionalism, or by the Liberal Culture's concept of the fifties.

Existential and spiritual problems the anthropoids struggle with are:

—the sexual aggression of one male targeted at one female;

—one unwanted pregnancy thanks to a faulty prophylactic; it is approached by both the authors and heroines with *femacho*—that is with that mixture of low-brow cockiness and moronicality once called *macho* which has made dunces out of men through the ages; it is supposed to grace the women of the seventies, but was scarcely popular in the fifties.

The vulgarity and obtuseness with which the scriptwriter and the director treat these mental and behavioral rashes are routine in today's Hollywood. Even the simple arts of allusion, suggestion, visual metaphor, or just making the characters communicate through acting and dialogue, for the present filmmakers seem as useless as they would for meat packing or sanitation workers. Thus, what remains interesting is the theater

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audience's response to such crude schlock.

The movie is immensely popular with teenagers who seem in the throes of nostalgia for the '50s. They mob movie houses and appear to be uproariously amused by the contraceptive mishap. Any mention of crotch or menstruation is greeted with joy and a burst of applause. At the same time, however, every hint at corniness, as it is remembered from that innocent, or rather sanitized era, is received with sighs and an eager empathy. It is a puzzling ambiguity. Sensing the mood in the darkness of a show one gets an impression of the symbolic quandary of the American popular culture. By successfully invading it through the last 15 years, the Liberal Culture has accomplished a bizarre reversal of gospels. The lack of inhibition in word and deed, whatever its motivation, is the king of today's cultural ambiences, but a subcutaneous impulse to some innocence—whatever it means, or may mean, in the '70s—coexists with the most repulsive trivialities.

Movies like *Grease* somehow help us to realize that stripping human conduct of all conventions is more of a brutal oppression than all the ancient lies about storks and ideal love among teenagers. Such movies may ultimately perform some socially valuable function. □

Journalism

New York Times' Commandment

We may call it the "Ten and a Halfth" commandment, for the *New York Times* has spoken and the native liberal consciences across the land have been awestruck by the bedazzling, mind-disarming sagacity of its words. What did the venerated repository of liberal gout speak out about? It spake about censorship.

The lead editorial was entitled "A Bit of Censorship," and it went about establishing that such a thing is impossible and unthinkable. To prove it, *NYT* sets authority (apparently *any* authority—moral, civic, political, communal, intellectual, etc.) against the freedom of speech as two irreconcilable absolutes. To facilitate this bit of philosophical acrobatics, the editorial's conceptualist (or team of them) shrewdly and spuriously equates "orthodoxy" with "authority," blurring the difference between these two distinct notions and accusing all those who object to the deluge of cultural-permissive obtuseness of "orthodoxy." *NYT* pontificates:

> "Orthodoxy carries its own imperative: someone must define it. What distinguishes democrats is that they have no such someone. So they must suppress the occasional, and understandable, temptation to define what is orthodox. Nazis must be left to march not because they are acceptable but because we trust no one with the definition of what is. A burst of dirty words on a radio broadcast should not be the cause of government censure because no single authority can be trusted to label ideas as indecent."

Such obvious falsifications of factuality notwithstanding (we already *know* what Nazism *is;* there *is* a fundamental difference between dirty words and indecent ideas), we are then asked to accept the mendacious and self-serving, allegedly democratic "truth" that authority, one of the cornerstones of civilization, is a dirty word itself because it could impose on the *Times* and the media certain rules of conduct. What's wrong with the authority of Moses' faith, Christ's teachings, Plato's wisdom, Aristotle's knowledge the *Times* won't elucidate. However, whenever the *New York Times'* journalistic authority of information and judgment is called into question, the critics are immediately and hatefully persecuted as imperial presidents, bigoted authoritarians, etc.

The *Times'* quest for absolute power and absolute license is coupled in the editorial with a matter-of-fact hypocrisy. *NYT* censures the Supreme Court for searching "for reasonable definitions": such is a futile occupation, according to *NYT.* However, the *Times* knows without a shred of hesitation what the "ultimate values of our society" are—and one, *NYT* asserts, is the reasonableness of the freedom of the press' taboo.

It is easy and bathetically noble to demand an absolute liberty, call it rationality, and not bother with daily realities and their consequences. Ultimately, such a stance is nothing but an immense distrust of and contempt for the human mind: *NYT* automatically assumes that men do not have the faculty to distinguish between bad and good, better or worse, and thus cannot make decisions that affect public consensus or disagreement in keeping with empiricism, circumstance and good sense. Any American has the right to be unsympathetic to orthodoxy of thought and principle, but telling Americans that orthodoxy is the same as authority, and superciliously claiming that we would be unable to tell one from another, is a peculiar arrogance that stems from an arbitrary power—apparently the *Times'* most cherished and flaunted status.

None of the First Amendment absolutists could ever explain how an administrative action against Larry Flynt's cultural pus would curtail the political, social, religious, literary, or artistic freedom of expression—but the apocalyptic half-truths and hackneyed slogans about the "indivisibility" of freedom never leave *NYT's* editorial pages. However,freedom is divisible—there exists a better and a worse freedom, and man is equipped with tools of cognition to constantly evaluate and re-evaluate freedom's contents. And, above all, freedom is man's construct and therefore cannot be absolutized, and

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the freedom of a madhouse cannot be recommended to normal, sane people as a social model. Freedom is human, thus it must not be immune to the limitations and relativities of everything human. It thus can be restructured, repaired, regulated and amended according to human needs and recognition. There is nothing metaphysical or sacrosanct about freedom, and people of as much moral frailty as any of us must not be permitted to command *more* freedom than anyone else—which is exactly what the press clamors for itself. The pornographic pollution threatens the very core of interhuman bonds; it has exceeded by far the visual sphere and averting our eyes from what we do not wish to see (the *Times* style liberals term it our "constitutional right") no longer helps. Abomination is in the air and a moment has come when we must revise our notion of freedom as it pertains to pornography. Certainly, the *Times* may claim that to protect the freedom of the airwaves we should refrain from breathing, but this sort of "freedom" of the media may meet some stiff resistance.

But, of course, it would be a weak editorial, from the liberal standpoint, if it only made such smartly-insipid demands. The *Times* boldly goes further, and derides the Supreme Court's concern about the media's insensitivity (we would prefer callousness) to the rights of privacy and personal reputation. It then insolently declares: "In the name of protecting secrets, the censorship of books criticizing government has begun"—and offers an astonishingly impudent counsel to the government and society: ". . . secrets can be guarded."

One marvels at how many subtle prevarications can be crammed into the sentences of one editorial. The *New York Times* is one of the top architects of a reality in which anyone who divulges secrets, betrays the American government, or breaks an oath of service, is instantly and royally rewarded with money and fame. The media's sycophants, columnists, feature "writers" immediately build up any human piece of psychotic, ellsbergian nothingness into a national movement. One is amazed how far prevarication can go without being called an outright lie: ". . . there is no such thing as a little bit of prudent censorship," intones the *Times.* A study by Accuracy in Media, published in 1977 proves beyond doubt that the *New York Times* itself censors the news. During 1976, *NYT* ran 66 stories on the human rights violations in Chile, 61 stories on the same in South Korea, 4 in Cambodia, 3 in Cuba, zero in North Korea. To an unprejudiced eye, life in South Korea is paradise for 99% of its population as compared to life in Cambodia, but the *New York Times* engages in what is in fact censorship by withholding from the American people the news that does not fit its ideology. The editors of the *Times* certainly do not want communism for themselves, but consider it infinitely better than anything else for Chileans, Cubans, Koreans, Zambians, Rhodesians, Ukrainians, Vietnamese, etc.—in keeping with that repulsive liberal moral category which helpless ironists call selective conscience. Actually, it is a "bit of prudent censorship," as every editing is, and it is only their adamantly calling it "journalistic unassailability" that makes people mad. Apparently, the editors of the *Times* do not understand that, for some time, they and their powerful liberal confreres in the press have been considered by the rest of society as a special interest group with exceptional privileges hell-bent on preserving their supremacy by any means. Thus, accordingly hated and despised, their latent totalitarianism, daily presented as "service to the people," whose "right to know" is manipulated by what the press wants them to know, is nowadays in obvious conflict with the ethos of the American democracy. Cant raised to an absolute does not cease to be cant: the *Times* pretends to defend us from the excess of power and incessantly gathers in more power. It exhorts the Supreme Court to "diffuse" power, and at the same time concentrates and forms an increasing tyranny of opinion-making. It accuses those who oppose it of "orthodoxy"—the Supreme Court, parents and teachers, non-liberal moralists and educators—while rabidly upholding the orthodoxy of its own exceptionality. Which will only breed more and more hatred in the future. (LT) □

Parade's Informed Opinion

Parade, which calls itself *The Sunday Newspaper Magazine,* and goes to millions of American homes on the day of worship and rest, features an introductory department entitled "Walter Scott's Personality Parade." Every week, a Walter Scott answers questions of this kind:

"Question: Did Liza Minelli ever live with Lucille Ball's ex-husband, Desi Arnaz?

Answer: No. She was in love for a while with his son, Desi Jr., but then—as is her way—moved on to others.

Question: What is meant by this sentence: 'Erroll Flynn was a sexual adventurer?'

Answer: In the case of the late film star, it means he slept with many women."

Why a person in Jacksonville, Florida wants to know exactly when and with whom a film actress of sleazy caliber lived—unless personal matters are involved—will remain one of the more insoluble enigmas of our time. That a woman in Erie, Pa. has to ask a newspaper what a "sexual adventurer" is, is the triumph of the low-brow pop-cultural brainwashing touted as the mission of American Journalism these days. After all, "Walter Scott" advertises his column by *his* journalistic ideology: "Want the facts? Want the informed opinions? Write Walter Scott . . ." The First Amendment is all his. □

Next *Persuasion At Work:*
TWIN BREAKTHROUGH!

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Liberal Culture

Love and Veneration

Vicki Witt from Lansing, Michigan, the August *Playboy* centerfold special, displays there the treasures of femininity once considered precious by dint of their exclusivity. She also has a fiance, who—it could be imagined—cherishes her gifts of love, as everybody so blessed would do. However, he does it in a peculiar way, as a partisan to collectivism of emotions and shared troves.

> "He gave me the push I needed," Miss Witt announced in an interview. "I would have been too shy to do it on my own. If he thinks something isn't right, he tells me . . . I feel very honored to be in *Playboy.* It's an experience I wish every girl could have."

What remains to be seen is the firm foundation of Miss Witt's and her fiance's future conjugal life. Will they put the *Playboy* centerfold into the family album for the edification of their grandchildren? Or, will they, in their twilight years, sentimentally muse: "Remember, dear, that month of August, back in '78, when six million *Playboy* readers dwelt upon and discussed your (my) . . ."

New York's Arcadia

New York Magazine, the Liberal Culture's lyrical vade mecum, fondly describes in neo-Baedeker style a part of Central Park where some New York citizens look for spiritual sublimation and happiness:

> ". . . the serenity of the sun-flecked arboreal mecca the Ramble becomes for thousands of gay men throughout the day. The sun, the strolling, even the solitude, and the natural beauty of the park's most bucolic copse—more than the opportunity for a casual sexual encounter in the bushes—are the magnets that for much of this century have made the Ramble the city's best-known outdoor gathering place for gays."
>
> "The Tunnel is the most active group-sex scene in that area of the park. Some nights it will be crowded wall to wall with men until four in the morning."
>
> "These men are there looking not for danger but for a point of contact, a moment of warmth and touching and comfort."
>
> "There, around a large, gnarled old tree—the 'orgy tree'—there are little confessional-like spaces created by the untrimmed flora."

Rectitude in a Political Debate

A passage from a leaflet distributed nationally by N.O.W.'s Legal Defense and Education Fund, designed to mobilize financial support for the ERA battle, and signed by Ms. Betty Friedan:

> "It is becoming clear that the reactionary forces who are now on the rampage against equal rights are focusing on women in order to create a new right-wing movement in this country. They are the same forces who burned crosses on lawns in the South and painted swastikas on synagogues, who fomented hate against Blacks and Jews and fought the organizations of labor and every other movement for human rights and freedom in this country. Today they are trying to destroy the women's movement, as a whole, by blocking ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. And if they succeed, I think we can forget about equal opportunity for women in this century."

How exciting to know what the housewives against ERA do in whatever time they have left after scrubbing bathrooms and changing diapers. Of course, they burn crosses on lawns and paint swastikas on synagogues.

What Price Maturity

"Leslie has grown up . . ." stated an authority in a Los Angeles court. What he wanted to make clear was that the defendant should be forgiven and live undisturbed among us, as the pains, antics and irresponsibilities of growing up are already in her past.

His client was Leslie Van Houten of the bestial Manson family who slew people at random. In the light of what we read in libcultural magazines about crime and punishment, the lawyer's argumentation made sense.

California Chutzpah

Chutzpah is actually considered a New York term borrowed from Hebrew via Yiddish. It carries a deadly precision in two syllables. When a scoundrel claims, with shameless intensity, that he is a saint, when a crook obtrusively insists on his lily-white honesty, when a dimwit obstreperously pretends to be a sage—we witness chutzpah at work. This exotic word well serves the communicative process in America.

We now have a California variation of chutzpah. If the New York version had its semantic roots in the urban jungle and the non-stop fight for survival, the California brand appears to originate in the arrogance and egotism of the sunny and easy life there. So, according to *Time,* (itself an inveterate worshipper of chutzpah) Ms. Joan Baez declared after having met Andrei Sakharov in Moscow:

> "He is paying a much higher price for his dissenting views than I ever had to pay for mine."

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This is chutzpah. Ms. Baez paid nothing for what she did. During the war, Ms. Baez was a fierce supporter of communist aggression, sang in tune with Hanoi and rendered it invaluable services. For opposing and sabotaging the American war effort she became an American millionaire. Her songs, expressing proletarian and pro-communist messages, acquired her chic apparel and luxury cars.

One wonders what the Baezes, Chomskys, Sontags, Haydens and Fondas feel when they see on TV these days (yes, the same American TV that did everything possible to psychically disarm America during the war) the recent tragedy of the Great Vietnamese Leap into the ocean. Countless decrepit little boats, with SOS signs on the spread-out bedsheets, desperately cruise the China Sea in hopes of being picked up by passing ships. They are crammed with refugees escaping the communist rulers whom the Chomskys, Baezes, etc. so valiantly helped to victory. CBS recently showed such a contingent of exhausted, despondent people who were rescued by a vessel, the captain of which was quite disturbed by what to do with his own compassion—as no country, except Israel, is willing to extend unlimited hospitality to the victims of Marxist tyranny. They did not look like tools of American imperialism, war profiteers or fascist henchmen—that is, that sort of people the Chomskys, Baezes, and Sontags claimed were U.S. allies in Vietnam. They looked like miserable farmers and laborers, whom our soldiers—most often called psychotic killers by the Haydens and Fondas—once tried to defend from communist oppression. One of them, with the harrowed face of an Oriental peasant, told the CBS correspondent in barely understandable English: "Better death in the ocean than communism . . ." Confronting this, one can't help feeling that even the purest intentions of the protest movement harbored some disgraceful misjudgments. Presented today as yesterday's virtue, it is nothing more than despicable chutzpah.

New York Chutzpah

New Times, a radic-lib-cultural canard, published a comparative chart which is meant to prove that Mr. Andrew Young was correct when accusing America of detaining political prisoners while claiming their nonexistence. *New Times* did it by juxtaposing the Shcharansky case with the Truong case, in which a communist Vietnamese spy by the name of David Truong was caught red-handed by U.S. authorities while collecting classified and secret documents to transport out of the country.

The fact that Shcharansky never did anything remotely similar, and his "guilt" consisted of talking to foreigners—a sin in communism, but by far not legal proof of spying—matters little to the experts on unbiased justice from the *New Times.*

Neither do they seem to be bothered by the circumstance that they are objectively serving the Soviet *raison d'état* in the ongoing socio-cultural debate on human and civil rights. Whether *New Times* does this because of its overpowering love for journalistic "truth" or does it for commerical-sensationalist reasons, or just because of its lib-radical pro-communism—will remain forever unclear, and actually, is of little importance. American democracy will survive it. However, there's a little hitch in the *New Times'* argumentation. It does not deny that Truong tampered with confidential documents, a strictly punishable misdeed in every society and state, which Shcharansky did not. What *New Times* wants, claims and demands is a voice in determining *which* government documents are confidential, *what* is punishable, and how *much* punishment should be meted out to someone who acts on behalf of America's enemies. Once *New Times* establishes this kind of innovative judiciary process, there won't be any difficulty sending Nixon to the gallows and Truong to Harvard, while Shcharansky dreams about Jerusalem in Siberia. But cruelty inflicted upon the anti-communists seems to the Liberal Culture's promoters a trifle as compared to the atrocities inflicted upon the snail darter by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

And this is New York chutzpah at its best, or worst. Or just its most contemptible.

Enigmatic Choices

Evonne Goolagong, an Australian tennis player of international repute, enjoyed raves from the feminists all around the world, and laudatory treatises in chic magazines for being an aborigine and a woman independent enough to smash out an inadvertent male from the courts. Then, Ms. Gooloagong married and decided to compete in the last Wimbledon tournament not under her ethnically impeccable name, but sporting the pedestrian Anglo-Saxon personality of a housewife, Mrs. Cawley. No tract has yet been spotted in *Ms. Magazine,* elucidating this astonishing choice. A rather contemptuous silence has stretched around Mrs. Cawley.

Geniuses Are Among Us

The *Chicago Tribune,* the last of the classy journals not to recognize a great artist when it sees one, reports to its faithful readers on the torments of one Gerard Damiano, creator of *Deep Throat* and other monumental landmarks of the porno cinema. Mr. Damiano deplores the corruption of mores and reminisces on the raptures of his artistic past to the awestruck *Chicago Tribune* journalist:

> *"Deep Throat* was the last one I did that was fun. Suddenly everyone in the business began taking themselves so seriously. Work became very mechanical and very expensive. Now I had to deal with 'porno stars' who drove around in limousines. The technicians began wanting their cut. It was big money at all levels. People started to hate people. Before *Deep Throat,* we

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were all so happy just to be able to make films."

He then muses in an intellectually exquisite style:

"We the filmmakers have let our audience down. The adult films being made today appeal only to the lowest common denominator. The people in the industry don't realize that the audience has some intelligence. That's why we're still making films like *She Came on Time* and *Blondie Pays the Rent.* None of the sex films today is exploring human emotions honestly and openly. The next breakthrough in porno films will come about when filmmakers start to deal erotically through the audience's mind. Just showing the old 'in and out' doesn't do it anymore." □

Polemics & Exchanges

That's Bigotry, Gentlemen . . .

When Herbert Croly founded *The New Republic* in 1914, he did it with the help of money from Mr. and Mrs. Willard (née Whitney) Straight, of the New York railway fortune. Mr. Croly was a distinguished editor and writer who five years before had published *The Promise of American Life,* in which he called for the "restoration of the moral and spiritual values inherent in the creation of the American republic." This sounds exactly like the message which the Rockford College Institute and *Chronicles of Culture* have been trying to popularize in the late '70s, though, apparently, there have been some differences in its interpretation. According to Mr. Bruce Bliven, a long-time *TNR* staffer and chronicler:

"Office legend says that the first style sheet had only two items on it, which read: *The New Republic* will spell 'God' with a small 'g' and 'Negro' with a capital 'N.' "

It was, of course, that genteel American zealotry which made the heirs to W.C. Whitney's money dedicated to financing a program characterized by this kind of symbolism. In the course of time, this fervor has transmogrified into an impenetrable logic, if not a shady charm, affecting a good part of our upper class. Since Mr. Croly and the Straights, *TNR* has had a succession of millionaire owners and editors, though for a brief period the journal was edited by a Progressive Party presidential candidate, Mr. Henry Wallace, who had to make up for his relatively modest resources by benefiting from the domestic and foreign Communist support for his bid for the office. The current owner and editor, a Mr. Martin Peretz, happily does not need any outside help: in keeping with good tradition, he married into wealth. Naturally he supported Senators Eugene McCarthy and McGovern in their efforts to win the presidency.

Thus, it would be fair to say that *TNR* is a left-oriented, liberal and reformist journal with the consuming ambition to be seen as moderate, equitable and open-minded. Its persuasion, quite loudly formulated on occasion, is here and now beside the point, as we, on occasion, tend to object less to orientations than to tone and style. Style is a slippery substance: it has the uncanny ability to transmute itself into argument, or opinion, or even into an article of faith—and when it reaches that point, it threatens the "moral and spiritual values" of American philosophies and programs.

The legendary style sheet must have left a lasting impact of ideological consequence. In the August 19, 1978 issue, *TNR* takes on the advocates of tax limitation. It does not like Steiger's and Kemp's view of taxation as an economic and social factor. Subsequently the attack enlarges to include Jude Wanniski, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer, and—above all—Arthur Laffer, a professor of economics at the University of Southern California. Their sins: Laffer is the author of an economic theory, with strong conservative overtones, according to which the steady reduction of taxes brings about an increase, instead of a decrease, in the government's revenues; Wanniski has become its apologist and publicist in the press. But *TNR* does not make a dialectical effort and judge the case on its merits. Kemp is dismissed as the former quarterback for the Buffalo Bills, Laffer's Ph.D. is put into question, Wanniski is written about in the style used by *Pravda* to describe spies and conspirators; innuendos of self-promotion, crookedness and charlatanry float around, competence and character assassinations linger between the lines. One reads about these men in an article entitled: "Alms for the Rich" and subtitled "Fantasies of the New Conservative Economics":

"They are strangers to doubt. Their cultural backgrounds have given them a narrow perspective on the human condition (and on human motivation) which they have not been moved to transcend."

Why this rabidity?

Arthur Laffer has certainly hit the solar plexus of the liberal socio-economic ethos, which claims that paradise is attainable through taxation. Laffer's ideas are not debated, it's easier and more functional to write that he had to leave Washington "with his tail between his legs," or that he had tampered with his diploma. By the same token, *TNR* throws in a surprising conviction that his theory "provides a scapegoat for the rather slothful performance of American capitalism over the past few years," as if the Carter administration has been busy coddling business, which obstinately refuses to work. An astonishing statement ends one of the articles:

"No special interest is better organized than the business community. It can purchase the pages of newspapers, the minds of intellectuals and the votes of legislators."

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Such a sortie makes it unnecessary for *TNR* to explain why almost all of the print medium giants have been savagely vilifying the business community for decades, while an overwhelming number of American intellectuals teaches the newspapers how to do it. Which brings us to another *TNR* abuse of truth and decency, perhaps not quite so gross, but certainly more devious.

Not long ago, in its back-of-the-book page, entitled "Washington Diarist"—dedicated to promulgating sentiments in a light-hearted way—a staff writer expressed his thoughts on Ben Wattenberg and his TV series "In Search of the Real America," after having participated in the introductory cocktails and buffet. We quote:

> "Wattenberg is a lone voice crying in the wilderness in defense of capitalism, economic growth, democracy, patriotism, etc., with no one to give him succor and support except the Mobil Corporation, the American Enterprise Institute and a list of foundations as long as your arm. This preposterous pose of embattled isolation is a particular favorite of the neoconservatives. What I want to know is, Where is this chorus of failure and guilt? Have the other oil companies been sponsoring attacks on big business? Have the commercial networks been swamping the airwaves with left-wing critiques of the American system?"

One does not know what to do with this agglomeration of phony indignation, half-truth projected as insight and questions formulated to make falsehood sound like truth. Before Wattenberg started his series, there were numerous articles, some of them outrightly satirical, pointing out that he—the defender of capitalism—was unable to raise a penny for his enterprise, while John Kenneth Galbraith hardly knew what to do with all the money showered on him by corporations and capitalists. The irony of the situation was so obvious, and so painfully determined by the bare facts, that poking fun at Wattenberg was turning into a trenchant metaphor. For as everybody with open eyes knows, we regularly witness the paradox of big companies sponsoring attacks on big business at university seminars, symposiums, in foundation studies, TV programs, and advertising placement in scurrilous journals which promote preposterous post-Marxian clichés under the guise of conservation or liberationism. Yes, even if they had not been "swamping the airwaves," the commercial networks have been injecting and contaminating the airwaves with left-wing critiques of the American system for decades—and the *TNR* staffer knows it as well as much less sophisticated TV watchers. Actually, he knows it even better, as for 40 years *The New Republic* has waged an uninterrupted fight to make the printed press and the media an exclusive pasture of liberal ideas, rigidly fenced off from any rational discourse with other views.

When Mr. Peretz took over, there hovered some hope that *TNR's* custom of assassinating non-liberal thought would change. That the Voltairian spirit of fair dialogue and respect for the other's otherness, so vaunted as a liberal virtue, might prevail and make a comeback. But has it been so? *TNR* always aspired to fame as an organ of civilized commitment. The great art of such a cultural role is to know how to be forthright without slipping into bigotry. What we see these days in the well-kept pages of *The New Republic* is, unfortunately, just bigotry. *(CC)* □

Comment *continued from page 5*

> and state bureaucracy, here—cant is manipulated into social rules by the liberal intellectual elite. In other words: their lie is totalitarian, ours democratic . . ."

This is an opinion of a keen Polish observer of both contemporary scenes. The American intellectual elite, with the exception of a disproportionate minority, is in the bondage of the Liberal Culture.

Thus, we have a curious paradox. Throughout our history, societies have lived within a framework of the official culture, while elites, or social fringes, created their own, often antithetic, subcultures. They were called schismatic, nonconformist, Bohemian. The Liberal Culture, with its outlawing or normalcy and cancellation of common sense, fits perfectly into the rebellion of the periphery. However, things have become so hopelessly mixed up that we live in a cultural limbo. On the one hand, Liberal Culture has global, all-encompassing ambitions to become the official culture. It is not far from reaching this goal when little old ladies from Dubuque are the eager buyers of *Hustler* in motel newsstands far from home; and all a beefy Midwestern farmer hopes for is to look like Rod Stewart at his Sunday barn disco. On the other hand, the honor of rebelling has been passed to the common people. When the PTA combats the libcultural TV degeneracy, it's the society which has become independent and nonconformist, whereas the intellectual elites cringe and bootlick the libcultural officialdom.

* * *

"Everything has improved for the worse," a perceptive young lady recently remarked, assessing the changes that have occurred during her lifetime.

Her conscious observing of what's around her—in people's vicissitudes, books, political condition, movies, urban landscapes, fashion and behavioral styles—closely corresponds with the era of the rigid sway of the Liberal Culture. Nothing better describes this culture's achievements.

—Leopold Tyrmand

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About the Chronicles of Culture

". . . Rockford College is not your ordinary midwestern college. It publishes something called *Chronicles of Culture,* and by rare luck I have come upon [it]. . ."

—Richard Gordon, *The Cincinnati Post*

"In its brief existence *Chronicles of Culture* has rapidly crystallized into a strikingly attractive little journal, typographically pleasing, and entirely free of 'padding.'

"These materials would be wonderfully useful for subversive purposes. For example, they could be left behind, like miniature incendiary devices, in the faculty lounge of every college and high school in the country."

—Human Events

The Rockford College Institute

was founded on the premise that the continued existence of the American civilization—framed by the Constitution and shaped by constructive forces of the last two centuries—is at issue on the battlefields of culture. Culture, those currents of thought and arts that form emotions, preoccupations, interests and taste, already determines, even manipulates, politics and economy.

The fundamental institutions of the American ethos—individual liberty, private enterprise, social compromise, upward mobility and civic responsibility—are under attack, some on the verge of extinction. American pluralism, the key to this civilization's most deeply rooted successes, is undergoing an underhanded alteration.

The Rockford College Institute challenges the reigning Liberal-Cultural Establishment by asking the crucial questions of our moral and ideological everydayness. It attempts to provide the embattled American middle-class with a new force of cultural interpretations in the pages of its three periodicals:

The Rockford Papers *Chronicles of Culture*
Persuasion At Work

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